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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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Year One

When we endorsed Barack Obama, we held out hope that he might be a transformational president. That was clearly the way he viewed himself. He intended a profusion of reform legislation that would remake the U.S. economy. And that ambitious domestic program was to be replicated on the global stage. Just as he would create a new health care system, he would heal conflicts that had tormented humanity for decades, as well as build relations with longtime adversaries. He would succeed where other presidents, many other presidents, had failed.

Of course, it would be hard for any leader to measure up to this ideal. And there are many ways in which he has made little progress, if not outright flopped. Anti-Americanism remains a fact of global opinion; Iran's march toward the bomb doesn't look any less plausible; almost nobody (on either side of the divide) has praised Obama's opening moves in the Middle East peace process.

Yet there are lots of marks on the other side of the ledger. He has used the machinery of the regulatory state as a palliative for environmental depredations and consumer horrors. He has passed a stimulus package that is providing a nontrivial number of jobs and will restore broken infrastructure. And he is on the verge of passing a health care bill that will mark one of the grandest achievements in the history of social policy. All this might not exactly place him in the pantheon next to Franklin Roosevelt, and it won't satisfy the left wing of his party. But it's not a bad start, given all the constraints of the political system (and global order) in which he works.

Still, the most consequential action of the first year of his administration is the escalation of the war in Afghanistan. It is a policy that highlights the strengths (and weaknesses) of his presidency—and, in many ways, refutes the right-wing caricature that has slowly morphed into conventional wisdom.

Let's begin with the conception of the policy and dispose of the idiotic notion that he "dithered" in constructing it. Upon entering office, Obama quickly delivered on his promise to send more troops. When his commander on the ground asked for even larger numbers, the president didn't automatically accede to the request. He allowed space for a lively intramural debate, consulted experts, and weighed the costs of his options. In the end, he made a decision that has offended the base of his party and possibly injured his future political prospects. On strategic grounds, we believe he made the right choice. But the thoroughness and logic of the process by which he arrived at this decision double our confidence in that choice. This is exactly the type of pragmatism and non-ideological policymaking that sentient humans have craved after the Bush years.

We don't pretend that the virtues of this process can scrub the messiness from the policy. Obama's stance toward Pakistan, which is really the central front in the war on terrorism, remains shrouded in mystery—although the imperatives of Islamabad's domestic politics may preclude the United States from speaking loudly about our increasing presence there. And then there's the obvious double-talk about quickly withdrawing from a conflict that nobody believes can be quickly settled. But the White House Situation Room was designed to be the seventh level of no-easy-answers hell, and some of this messiness is simply unavoidable.

At the same time, for all our enthusiasm about Obama, there has been something missing. A presidency that was born in idealism has displayed little evidence of it. When Obama unveiled his escalation plan at West Point, he delivered a strangely inert speech that contained too much muddle to inspire. He described U.S. foreign policy as a matter of coldly acting on national interests, then tacked on a paean to American exceptionalism. He decried nation-building, while setting out on a campaign that his commanders describe as the very sort of counterinsurgency that entails constructing schools and governmental institutions.

Idealism is not meant to be the métier of governance. Aides will be ruthlessly stabbed in the back (Greg Craig); great goals will likely be sacrificed (the public option); and morally dubious characters will be engaged (Burma). Yet, as we enter the second year of the Obama presidency, we continue to nurture the hope that the idealism of the campaign will show itself again. There's a democratic movement emerging in Iran crying out for solidarity—and villains (on Wall Street and in Sudan) who must be spoken of in moralistic language. And, even in Afghanistan, our project clearly entails more than killing Al Qaeda. Our success depends on the birth of a new nation, and, even if this nation won't be a European social democracy, let alone as open as Iraq, we can demand that it respect certain human rights. Although the second year of Obama's presidency has not yet begun, we hope that historians will look back and note that it started early in Oslo—that December 2009 marked a new phase. For while there was plenty of realist truth in his speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, there were also bracing doses of idealism. To quote this stunning address: "Somewhere today, in the here and now, in the world as it is, a soldier sees he's outgunned, but stands firm to keep the peace. Somewhere today, in this world, a young protestor awaits the brutality of her government, but has the courage to march on. Somewhere today, a mother facing punishing poverty still takes the time to teach her child, scrapes together what few coins she has to send that child to school—because she believes that a cruel world still has a place for that child's dreams. Let us live by their example." ◆

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Screw Job

How Obama became the unemployment fall guy.

JONATHAN CHAIT

President Obama is like a pilot who took the controls of the plane in mid-flight after the engines fell out. It's obvious that he didn't cause the problem. But the passengers are going to focus on the fact that the plane was still airborne before he took over, and now, he's crash-landing in the ocean.

That's Obama's problem in the debate over the economy. His arguments are true. The trouble is, they don't *feel* true, and they feel less and less true as time goes by.

Republicans focus relentlessly on the simple fact that the economy is in worse shape now than it was before Obama took office. The *trajectory* may have improved, but the *level* has worsened—more people are out of work now than on January 20.

The Obama administration predicted in January that, if its stimulus package passed, unemployment would stay below 8 percent, yet it has crossed 10 percent. You have probably heard this statistic if you have heard any Republican in elected or unelected office open his mouth at any point over the last half-dozen months. The implication of this statistic—sometimes made explicit—is that the stimulus failed to alleviate, or even caused, rising unemployment.

The more plausible interpretation is that the Obama administration's January forecast, along with most private forecasts at the time, underestimated the depth of the recession. One bit of evidence for that view is that unemployment hit 8 percent by February, which was about the same time that the stimulus passed and long before it could take effect.

What level unemployment would have reached without a stimulus is, of course, a total guess. Republicans have ridiculed the administration's efforts to tabulate the jobs that the stimulus saved. The implication here is that, because you can't count something, it doesn't exist. It's true that there's no way to actually count the number of jobs saved by the stimulus. Even if you could accurately tabulate the workers hired by federal grants, you'd be missing all the jobs saved by the money those workers are spending. Not to mention the impact of the tax cuts, which account for two-fifths of the cost of the stimulus. So, while the positive effect of the stimulus is necessarily a guess, it's a guess shared by nonpartisan government agencies like the Congressional Budget Office as well as all the leading macroeconomic forecasters.

If you look at a graph of jobs lost by month, it resembles a pyramid, with the stack building through 2008, peaking in January 2009, then dropping down around zero over the course of this year. No serious person could dispute that the rise in unemployment reflects anything but the aftershocks of an economic collapse that predate the Obama presidency. (This likewise holds true of the rising budget deficit: CBO numbers show that approximately 100 percent of the long-term deficit increase results from Bush policies and the effects of the slowdown.)

The Republican strategy here consists of two nifty steps. Step one consists of affixing Obama with the blame for rising unemployment. Step two is, when Obama points out that the economic collapse occurred before he took office, pummel him as a classless blame-shirker. Columns by *National Review* editor Rich Lowry ("Obama the graceless"), *Wall Street Journal* columnist William McGurn ("The post-gracious president"), and numerous other conservative worthies have harped upon this theme. Obama must accede to the Republican campaign to blame him for the consequences of the 2008 economic collapse because to do otherwise would violate social etiquette. Obama's pointing out that he inherited the recession is "graceless, whiny, and tin-eared," complains Lowry.

At first, in a fit of naïveté, I assumed that the conservative belief in the impropriety of a president blaming his predecessor must be a deeply held principle unrelated to the partisan identity of the presidents in question. Sadly, after a quick search of the recent historical record, the scales fell from before my eyes. President Bush repeatedly asserted that he "inherited a recession"—the one that began in March of 2001—from Bill Clinton. He also charged that Clinton's weakness in the face of terrorism emboldened Al Qaeda to strike on September 11, which I would argue is even ruder than anything Obama has said about Bush. That particular theme also features prominently in Lowry's 2003 book, *Legacy: Paying the Price for the Clinton Years*.

Obama's trickiest dilemma is that the public does not agree with—or, to put it less charitably, understand—the basis for his anti-recession strategy. Whatever your view of deficits, they clearly make more sense during a recession than during an expansion, when deficit spending can help fuel overheated growth. The trouble is, public opinion tends to get loose with the purse strings during boom times and tight during recessions, which is the opposite of what you want. During the 1990s boom, the public favored expanded social spending and tax cuts over paying down the national debt. Today, by overwhelming margins, they favor an immediate balanced budget, even in the face of economic catastrophe.

That is, of course, insane. But Republicans have taken full advantage of the public's fiscal insanity. President Bush used to scoff at proposals to pay down the national debt, saying, "The surplus means the government has more money than it needs." Nowadays, Republicans like John Boehner say things like, "American families are tightening their belts," and, therefore, Washington should "lead by example and show the American people that the government can go on a diet as well."

What sounds to the American people like simple common sense is economic malpractice, and vice versa. Thus the Democrats' predicament: High unemployment is making them unpopular, but the only steps they can take to reduce unemployment are themselves unpopular. If the Democrats actually gave the people what they say they want—$1.4 trillion in spending cuts and/or tax hikes to eliminate the 2010 deficit—Republicans would capture approximately 100 percent of Congress in the next election.

"The American people are a lot smarter than people in Washington think," White House communications director Dan Pfeiffer said. "They understand we have to deal with jobs and deficits in a coordinated strategy." If the administration is dumb enough to actually believe that, it would help explain how they've let Republicans win the political argument over the economy. ◆

TRB
From Washington

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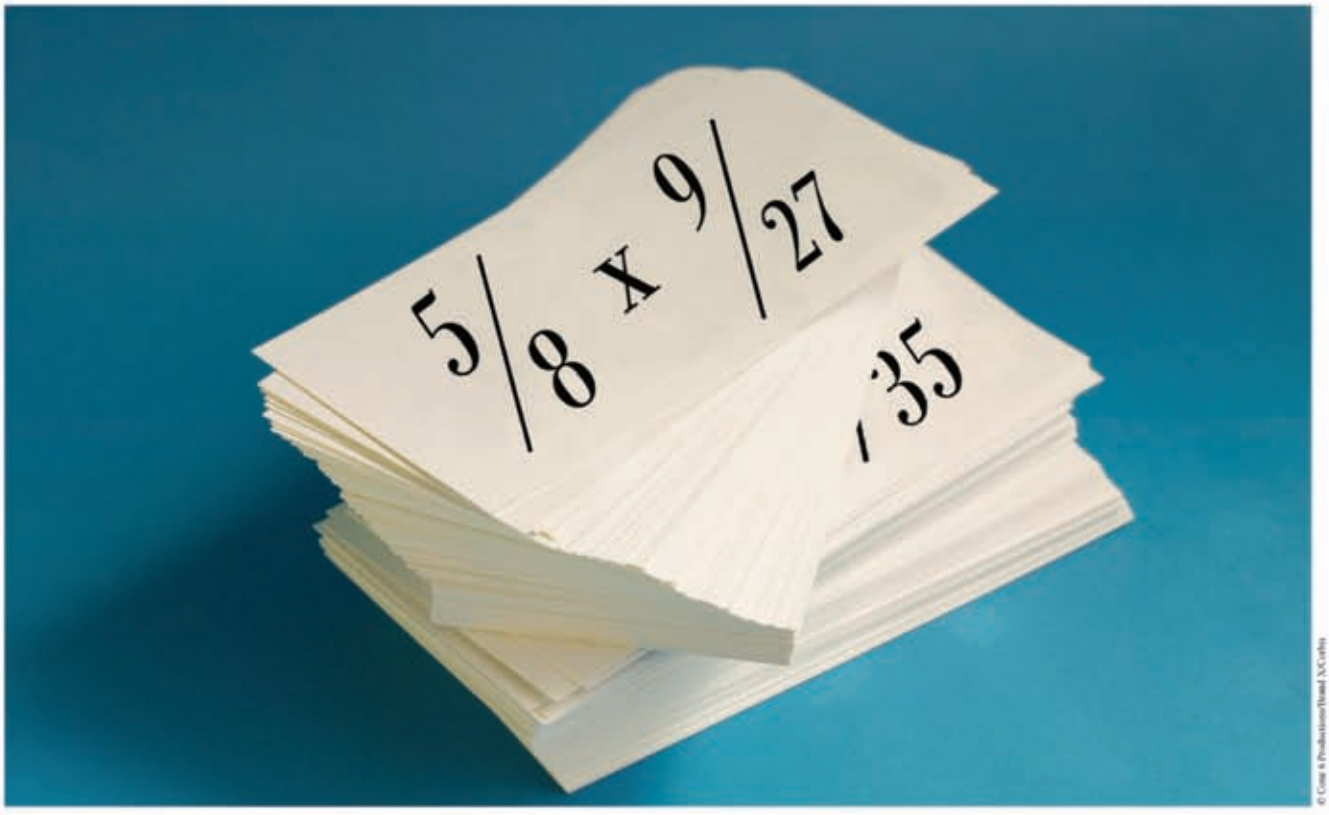

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Planet Worth

Goldman Sachs bets on global warming.

Of all the different industry groups scrambling to shape climate policy in Washington—from electric utilities to Detroit automakers—one stands out as a bit unexpected: Wall Street. Financial giants like Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan have enlisted, all told, more than 100 lobbyists to roam the Capitol and influence the debate over how to curb greenhouse gases. There's a reason for that: Any cap-and-trade bill that puts a limit on emissions and allows polluters to buy and sell permits will create a vast carbon market. That will mean new opportunities for financial firms to broker deals, package carbon offsets, or offer hedging instruments. And that, in turn, will mean profit. Little wonder that investment banks have been bulking up their carbon-trading desks in recent years.

But, given what happened the *last* time bankers went wild on a hot commodity, some politicians are leery of their interest in cap-and-trade. "I know the Wall Street crowd can't wait to sink their teeth into a new trillion-dollar trading market," wrote North Dakota Senator Byron Dorgan in July. "But given recent history, I have little confidence that markets are free or fair enough to trust them with a new, large cap-and-trade carbon securities market." A small but vocal group of climate activists agrees. In *The New York Times*, NASA scientist James Hansen warned that the carbon market "appears likely to be loosely regulated, to be open to speculators, and to include derivatives" and that bankers would extract profits by inflicting high energy costs on the public, while volatile prices would make it harder for companies to make investments. These critics prefer an approach that leaves Wall Street out—say, a simple carbon tax.

As it turns out, there's a decent case that a well-regulated carbon market would make tackling global warming easier—and that Wall Street's wizardry could be put to good use by lowering the overall costs of reducing emissions. But whether that actually happens will depend on Congress's ability to regulate the financial sector—a task it's planning to take up after health care. And that means the fate of climate policy may end up hinging on how financial reform shakes out.

To see why carbon markets can be a flexible tool for cutting emissions—and why they could also fall prey to the sorts of problems that dragged down the economy last year—it's worth reviewing how a cap-and-trade system works. Congress sets an overall limit on the amount of carbon dioxide that can be emitted by issuing a fixed number of pollution permits, which businesses can buy and sell; each year, the limit declines. Companies that decide it's cheaper to reduce their emissions (say, by boosting energy efficiency) than it is to buy permits will make those easy cuts first. As the cap tightens each year and the total number of permits dwindles, the cost of polluting will steadily rise, and more and more businesses will cut emissions rather than buy increasingly pricey permits.

That's where Wall Street comes in. Because the cost of permits depends on supply and demand—which, in turn, depends on factors like weather, economic activity, or the cost of clean-energy alternatives—the price of carbon can fluctuate quite a bit. A utility trying to decide whether to operate a power plant that will be around for decades may want to hedge against the chance that carbon prices will rise or fall, and so offload that risk onto investors by buying derivatives. (This is similar to how farmers can buy futures contracts to hedge against an unexpected plunge in wheat prices.) Meanwhile, outside investors would be making bets on how carbon prices will move. In theory, this is all supposed to make the market more efficient.

Critics of carbon-trading usually focus on this derivatives market, which could swell to as much as $2 trillion in the program's early years. "There's considerable worry that this market would have the problems that have been found in other physical commodity markets for the past few years," says Michael Greenberger, a University of Maryland law professor who oversaw the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission's trading division in the late 1990s. Speculators, for instance, could artificially inflate the price of carbon—which is what some economists think happened in the oil markets last year, when the price of crude shot up from $60 per barrel in February 2007 to $147 per barrel in 2008. That, in turn, could cause energy prices to skyrocket and lead to a mass revolt against the whole idea of a carbon cap.

A different worry involves carbon offsets. Under the House climate bill, companies could pay for outside projects that would reduce greenhouse-gas emissions—a tree-planting project in Brazil, for example—in lieu of making their own cuts. Polluters like having this option because it can often be cheaper to, say, stop deforestation than build a new wind farm. The downside, though, is that these projects require heavy scrutiny—you have to make sure those newly planted trees aren't chopped down two years later. So the EPA has to tightly limit what offset projects get approved. But, if Wall Street becomes heavily involved in arranging and financing offset deals, it might decide to use its lobbying clout to increase

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the number of available offsets—which could weaken oversight and let through dubious projects that don't actually bring emissions down. "They're interested in maximizing profit, not making the system as rigorous as possible," says Michelle Chan, an analyst at Friends of the Earth, an environmental group critical of cap-and-trade. "And more offsets equals more fees for Wall Street."

Not only that, but, in a report earlier this year, Friends of the Earth warned that, because offsets are inherently uncertain endeavors, they could become the newest version of subprime mortgages—call it "subprime carbon." In 2008, Credit Suisse bundled together 25 different offset projects that were at various stages of U.N. approval, divvied them up into securities, and sold the pieces off to investors—precisely the sort of deal that was rampant during the housing boom and set the stage for a meltdown once homeowners started defaulting.

Then again, plenty of experts argue that these concerns are overstated. After all, when the EU set up its cap-and-trade market in 2005, it decided to let a largely unregulated derivatives market build up, and, so far, fraud and manipulation have been minimal. (The EU did see the price of carbon crash in the early years, but that was because too many permits were erroneously handed out, not because of bankers.) "No one's complacent, but you just don't see the same sort of fear about this in Europe," says Jill Duggan of the World Resources Institute, who helped implement the EU's trading system. And, on the "subprime carbon" question, Andy Stevenson, a former hedge-fund manager who now works for the Natural Resources Defense Council, argues that investors aren't flocking to offset-backed securities—the Credit Suisse deal was an exception, and a poorly received one at that—because of the risks involved.

Still, Stevenson and other cap-and-trade backers agree on the need for sturdy market regulations. Examples include position limits (to make sure no single trader can dominate the carbon market) and stricter oversight of over-the-counter derivatives, which aren't traded on exchanges and have ballooned in recent years. What's more, the Kerry-Boxer cap-and-trade bill in the Senate would set a ceiling on the price of carbon: If prices rose above a certain point, the government would start releasing a reserve of permits into the market in order to drive down prices and discourage speculators.

Of course, whether all of those safeguards will actually make it into law is still an open question. The House climate bill included a stringent set of regulations for energy and carbon markets, authored by Bart Stupak, but those rules will be superseded by whatever broader financial-reform package Congress ends up passing in the months ahead. And many cap-and-trade skeptics fear that the House and Senate will end up letting Wall Street off easy. "The debate's still very fluid," says Chan, "but, in the last few months, we've watched some of the leading derivative regulations become riddled with loopholes." What's more, says Joseph Mason, an economist at Louisiana State University and a critic of carbon trading, it's not always possible to legislate fraud and manipulation out of existence. "A million traders can think of many different ways to take advantage of these contracts that you never thought of."

That's why some proponents of tackling carbon are starting to look more fondly on the "cap-and-dividend" idea being pushed by Maria Cantwell, a Washington Democrat and one of the leading critics of derivatives in the Senate. In Cantwell's bill, carbon would be capped at the source—at the coal mine or the oil well—and the price signal would trickle down through the rest of the economy. The money raised from selling permits would be largely rebated back to consumers, and there'd be little trading and not much room for Wall Street. (Not everyone agrees that this is a plus: Stevenson argues that less liquidity in the system could, at times, lead to *more* price volatility than in a larger, more active market.)

But the politics are the crucial question: So far, cap-and-dividend has attracted interest from some corners—notably, Maine Republican Susan Collins is co-sponsoring Cantwell's bill—but, as yet, it doesn't have the wide support that cap-and-trade enjoys. Still, if financial reform goes badly and more Democrats start fretting about Wall Street's enthusiasm for carbon trading, this could be the next big climate battle.

Bradford Plumer

COIN Toss

The cult of counterinsurgency.

On the night of December 1, shortly after Barack Obama announced plans to send 30,000 more U.S. troops to Afghanistan, retired Lt. Colonel John Nagl appeared on MSNBC's "The Rachel Maddow Show." Maddow was dismayed by Obama's new plan, which she called "massive escalation," but, when she introduced Nagl, a counterinsurgency expert who has long called for a greater U.S. commitment to Afghanistan—even if it means raising taxes and expanding the military—she was surprisingly friendly. And, after Nagl spent the segment praising Obama's plan, which he said would throw back the Taliban and enable more civil and economic development, Maddow may have remained skeptical—but she was also admiring. "It's a real pleasure to have you on the show, John," she said.

Had someone like Bill Kristol given that same assessment of Obama's speech, Maddow might have tarred him as a bloodthirsty proponent of endless war. Which is why Nagl is one of the administration's most important allies as it tries to sell the United States on a renewed commitment to Afghanistan. A former tank commander in Iraq and co-author of the Army's landmark 2006 counterinsurgency manual, Nagl has become a fixture on television and in news articles about Afghanistan; he's even made an appearance on "The Daily Show." With the authority of a man who has worn a uniform in combat, and the intellectual heft of a Rhodes Scholar, he has helped to persuade many liberals that pursuing a counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan is the only viable path to success.

Certainly, that's what Obama and his staff are hoping. During Obama's Afghanistan review process this fall, top White House aides like Rahm Emanuel were immersed in Lewis Sorley's *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam*, which argues that counterinsurgency techniques were turning around the Vietnam war until Washington pulled the plug in exhaustion. And, by committing 30,000 troops, plus winning almost 10,000 more from NATO allies, Obama has effectively endorsed General Stanley McChrystal's written assessment of the war, the first page of which calls for "an integrated civilian-military counterinsurgency campaign." "I would say that the decision the president reached is an acknowledgement that counterinsurgency is the least bad of the options available," Nagl says.

Another reason Nagl has sway with the left and the Obama administration—

ANTHONY RUSSO

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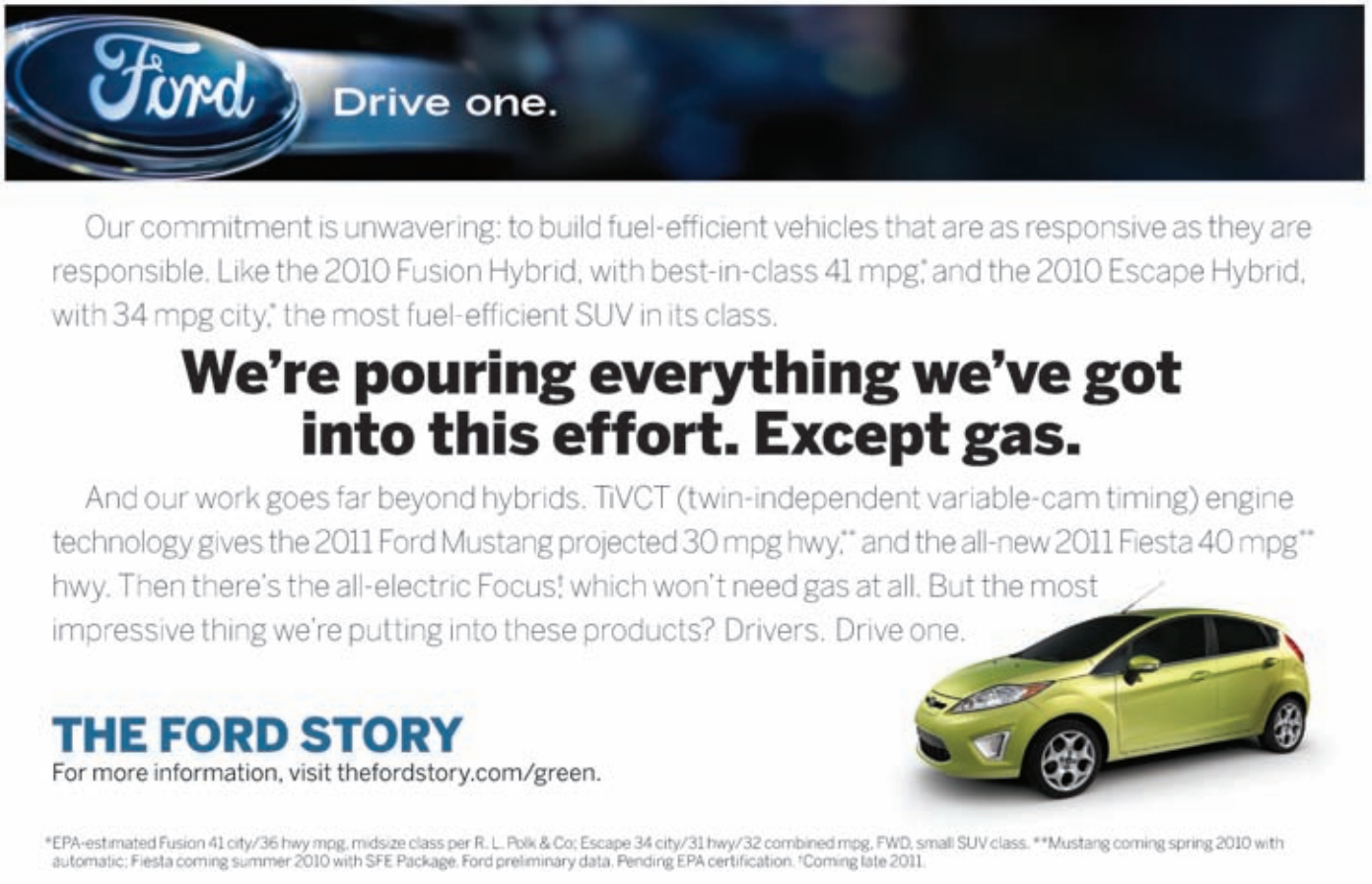
he was recently named to the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board—has to do with where he hangs his hat. Nagl is currently president of the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), a Washington think tank established in February 2007 by a group of former Clintonites who wanted to reassert the voice of centrist Democrats on military and foreign affairs. Since then, a full 14 former CNAS hands have landed jobs inside Obama's Pentagon and State Department. Those who remain work on a variety of issues, from China to climate change. But these days, CNAS is most visible for its policy papers and commentary on counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and Iraq. Its Democratic roots have given CNAS cred from Capitol Hill to the White House to places like Maddow's set. And its prominence, in turn, has effectively hitched the Democratic wagon to the ambitious ideals of counterinsurgency, with some liberals even arguing that the doctrine—with its emphasis on protecting and improving the lives of civilians—is thoughtful, humane, and, therefore, inherently progressive.

But there is risk in this approach. Washington's current enthusiasm for counterinsurgency is based largely on its apparent success in stabilizing Iraq—even though it's not clear that the doctrine's sophisticated tenets deserve all or even most of the credit. Indeed, an argument is brewing in military circles about whether the doctrine's potential has been oversold. What happens next in Afghanistan could settle it.

In early 2007, defense analyst Michèle Flournoy and Asia expert Kurt Campbell co-founded CNAS with what they described as a mission of reclaiming the "pragmatic," nonideological center of the foreign policy debate. Supported with money from left-leaning foundations and defense contractors, including Boeing and Northrop Grumman, they hired a team of mostly Democratic foreign policy hands and produced policy papers with a generally hawkish bent, including one in 2008 that opposed a fixed timeline for withdrawal from Iraq.

CNAS wasn't intended to be counterinsurgency central. After Obama was elected, however, he raided the think tank to staff the State and Defense departments. (Flournoy took a job as the Pentagon's senior policy official, and Campbell became Foggy Bottom's top Asia hand.) Filling the void has been Nagl, who joined CNAS in January 2008 and became its president in February 2009, along with several counterinsurgency-centric colleagues who have joined since its founding. One is Andrew Exum, a former Army Ranger who has served in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Exum, in his early thirties, is a bearded and wry native of East Tennessee who advised McChrystal's review team this summer. Then there's CNAS's 32-year-old CEO, Nate Fick, who was a Marine captain in Baghdad and has served as a civilian instructor at a counterinsurgency academy in Kabul. Last year, CNAS also signed up the ultimate counterinsurgency guru in David Kilcullen, an Australian who served as a top adviser to General David Petraeus in Iraq. Together, this quartet has churned out a raft of policy papers, opinion pieces, and quotes about counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan, ranging from the best way to set benchmarks for progress to warnings about the use of aerial drone strikes. (Exum, Fick, and Kilcullen oppose heavy reliance on the tactic for fear that civilian casualties will cause blowback.)

Though CNAS is loath to be known as a one-trick pony—it recently completed a report encouraging U.S. cooperation with China and runs an energy and climate-based "natural security"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program—it is effectively cornering the market on counterinsurgency thought. In addition to its staff hires, CNAS has provided fellowships to book-writing journalists like Tom Ricks, David Cloud, and Greg Jaffe, who have advanced the pro-counterinsurgency narrative. But perhaps the clearest indication of both CNAS's clout and its current focus came when the think tank held its third annual conference at Washington's posh Willard Hotel. The keynote speaker was none other than Petraeus himself.

THE STAKES FOR the United States in Afghanistan are enormous. But, in a more parochial sense, so are the stakes for CNAS and what you might call the cult of counterinsurgency. Washington is already planning for a more counterinsurgency-oriented future—witness the latest Pentagon budget, which shifts billions of dollars away from high-tech weapons systems designed for fighting a great power like China, toward equipment like aerial drones and armored personnel carriers. Meanwhile, the liberal national security establishment has come to embrace a doctrine that went into vogue under the dreaded Bush regime. In an essay titled "Petraeus the Progressive" published in the journal *Democracy* last winter, Rachel Kleinfeld, president of the center-left Truman National Security Project, celebrated Petraeus for emphasizing the battle for Iraqi hearts and minds over "outgunning and outmanning the enemy." Other liberals warm to the doctrine's intellectual sheen. "Counterinsurgency is not just thinking man's warfare—it is the graduate level of war," states an epigraph in the Army's counterinsurgency manual.

But some thoughtful skeptics warn that the months ahead in Afghanistan may expose the promise of counterinsurgency as a mirage. One of them is Colonel Gian Gentile, a former cavalry squadron commander in Iraq with a Stanford University Ph.D. in history. Since his 2007 return from Iraq, Gentile, who now teaches at West Point, has relentlessly challenged the arguments of counterinsurgency proponents. Advocates of the doctrine say that it has been repeatedly tested and proved in conflicts ranging from Vietnam to Iraq. Through several articles in military journals, Gentile has been fighting this "narrative," which he says has various historical flaws. He warns, for instance, that counterinsurgency campaigns are more violent than people understand. The British victory in Malaya involved brute force and mass resettlement programs, for example, while the more recent defeat of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka involved a heavy military campaign that caused widespread civilian misery. Even the Iraq surge caused a dramatic increase in civilian casualties from airstrikes and led to a spike in the number of Iraqi detainees held by the United States, notes Michael Cohen of the New America Foundation.

Gentile is especially skeptical of the claim that counterinsurgency saved Iraq. To hear the likes of Nagl tell it, Petraeus implemented a new strategy in 2006 under which U.S. troops left the isolation of fortress-like bases and integrated themselves with Iraqi forces and the Iraqi people, improving training of the Iraqi army, winning the population's trust, and helping to turn Sunni tribesmen in Anbar province against Al Qaeda. But some contrarian military thinkers warn that the story is far more complicated. It's not clear that the Sunnis needed our encouragement to turn on Al Qaeda, for instance, and ethnic cleansing may have burned itself out. Celeste Ward, a Bush Pentagon official who advised Army Lt. General Peter W. Chiarelli in Iraq, says that some military units *had* been practicing counterinsurgency in Iraq, to little avail, before Petraeus overhauled the American strategy there. "To think that the reduction of violence was primarily the result of American military action is hubris run amuck [sic]," Gentile writes in the fall edition of the military journal *Parameters*.

GENTILE IS CONVINCED that Obama's "surge" in Afghanistan can't work—at least not in a time frame that Obama or his country will accept. "I think history shows that if a nation is going to try this kind of military method—population-centric counterinsurgency, which is also nation building—it doesn't happen in a couple of years. It's a generational commitment." And, if Afghanistan doesn't turn around soon, the Democrats who founded and support CNAS, and who have come to embrace the Petraeus-Nagl view of modern warfare, may find themselves wondering whether it's time to go back to the drawing board.

MICHAEL CROWLEY

Bunker Mentality

Barack Obama's dangerous obsession with golf.

IT'S BEEN A TOUGH first year for President Obama, as critics throughout the body politic bemoan that Mr. Change-We-Can-Believe-In is looking more and more like Mr. Politics-As-Usual. With the holiday break, however, POTUS has a prime opportunity to regroup, reload, and revamp his image for the coming year. He could start by ditching golf.

Seriously. Its venerable White House history notwithstanding, golf is a dubious pastime for any decent, sane person, much less for this particular president. Why would a leader vowing to shake up Washington—to alter the very nature of politics—sell his soul to a leisure activity that screams stodgy, hyperconventional Old Guard?

There are signs that Obama has been nursing a creeping golf addiction for some time now. He took up the game a little more than a decade ago as a newbie state senator hoping to bond with more rural, conservative colleagues. Next thing you know, he was hooked—playing for cash, fretting over his form, and goading staffers to cut out of work early for a quick round.

During the 2008 race, Obama's golf outings drew less notice than his battles on the hard court. But, now that he's firmly ensconced in the Oval Office, the sticks have come out of the closet as Obama constantly looks to squeeze in a few holes: on Father's Day, during the family's summer holiday on the Vineyard, immediately upon touching down from his June trip to Europe. It is often noted that this president hit the links more frequently in his first nine months than the reared-on-golf George W. did in his first two years (after which W. conspicuously swore off the game out of respect for the troops). Currently ranked eighth on *Golf Digest*'s list of presidential golfers (sandwiched between Clinton and Reagan), Obama seems intent on moving up the ladder—despite reports that he's something of a duffer.

Various explanations have been floated for Obama's embrace of golf: (1) Professional advancement. Ostensibly why Obama started playing, golf is indeed a time-honored way for ambitious political and business types to schmooze. In *First Off the Tee*, Don Van Natta Jr.'s book about presidential golfers, we learn that, as vice president, Richard Nixon went so far as to take lessons in hopes of impressing his golf-crazed boss, President Eisenhower. (2) Escape. All those hours of intense focus on getting the wee ball in the wee hole provide relief from the pressures of the office. (3) Testosterone.

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With all of the competition but none of the bruising of real sports, golf is what hard-charging alpha males turn to when they start getting too old to bang around in the paint. (4) Image control. Obama's enthusiastic adoption of this most corporate of pastimes reassures middle-Americans that their history-making black president isn't too urban, edgy, or cool. (As a bonus, golf is popular among retirees, who were stubbornly unwowed by Obama's trail talk of hope and change.) (5) Tradition. With only three of the past 18 presidents *not* playing the game, golf is just something Americans expect our leader to do.

Golf is a dying game. So why is Obama playing it?

But just because other presidents have done it doesn't mean there aren't political risks involved. In the popular imagination, golf is the stuff of corporate deal-cutting, congressional junkets, and country club exclusivity. And, unless a president is very careful, a golf habit can easily be spun as evidence of unseemly character traits ranging from laziness to callousness to out-of-touch elitism. As a senator, John F. Kennedy scored political points on Eisenhower by mocking Ike's golf obsession—while taking pains to keep his own golfing gifts under wraps. (As Van Natta recounts, JFK forbade the media from photographing him at play.) Bushes 41 and 43 were both slammed for golfing during wartime. It has been posited that W. quit the game in part because of the stinging coverage of comments he made on the golf course in August 2002, following a suicide bombing in Israel. "There are a few killers who want to stop the peace process that we have started, and we must not let them," Bush told the assembled journalists. "I call upon all nations to do everything they can to stop these terrorist killers. Thank you. Now watch this drive." The tone-deaf clip eventually made its way into Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. It was not one of golf's finer moments.

More broadly, for all the blather about how golf is *soooo* much less elitist than it used to be—a line being aggressively peddled these days by the head of Scotland's Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews in an effort to return the game to the Olympic lineup for the first time in over a century—it remains largely the province of reasonably affluent white guys. (Memo to the R&A: That whole golf-is-egalitarian pitch might be more persuasive if your club weren't still boys-only.) There are fewer black faces on the PGA Tour now than there were three decades ago, and Augusta National's 2003 fight to keep women out of its clubhouse did nothing to improve the game's sexist rep.

And if we really want to get harsh about it: Golf is a dying game—on the skids for nearly a decade, according to a 2008 report by the National Golf Foundation. The number of Americans who golf has fallen by some four million, while the number who golf frequently (25-plus rounds a year) has plummeted by a third. One observed problem: evolving family dynamics. Men once free to spend all weekend on the links are now expected to help shuttle the kids to soccer, walk the dog, and generally pull their weight on the home front. The first lady may be understanding about her man's special recreational needs. But does President Obama really want to be associated with a game so antithetical to modern life?

Michelle Cottle

Spend and Save

White House dilemma: Die now or pay later.

As of late this summer, Democrats in Washington shared a tidy consensus about the economy: The stimulus was working more or less on schedule, and the job market was gradually recovering. That meant the administration could start thinking about how to rein in the country's yawning budget deficit, if not actually scale it back yet.

What followed turned that tidy consensus into a pigsty. On October 2, the Labor Department announced that September's job-loss total was roughly 60,000 higher than the previous month's, prompting a hastily convened powwow between the president, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. (The number has since been revised downward.) Then, in early November, Democratic candidates handily lost gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia, with independents deserting the party in droves. "For those up next year, it was a wake-up call on the deficit," says one Senate Democratic aide. Suddenly, spending more money on jobs didn't look so appetizing. That is, until the following Friday, when the next jobs report showed the unemployment rate jumping from 9.8 percent to 10.2 percent—clearing a psychological threshold that was no less terrifying for being foreseeable. And on and on it went. "The entire town is more schizophrenic than I've ever seen," says one senior administration official. "Everyone cares about jobs, and everyone cares about fiscal discipline. The weight shifts week by week, unemployment report by unemployment report."

The basic problem is that any additional stimulus adds to the deficit, while deficit reduction steps on a weak economy. And so, Democrats now find themselves having to pull off a balancing act that would seem to defy the laws of economics: taking on both tasks simultaneously. "We've got about as difficult an economic play as is possible," the president observed at his recent jobs summit.

There was, of course, one famous attempt at this feat during the last generation: the Clinton administration's in early 1993. The decision about whether to rein in the bulging deficit or spend money on the rickety economy divided the incoming Clinton team. But, in retrospect, the challenge was much easier than the one confronting Obama. For one thing, GDP had been growing for almost two years in early 1993, versus only

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a single quarter today; unemployment was almost three points lower. For another, the deficit was actually far more tractable back then. The end of the cold war promised a peace dividend, and the bill for the baby boomers' Social Security and Medicare benefits was basically 20 to 25 years away. Today, the entitlement spending boom is right around the corner, we're surging in Afghanistan, we've spent a few hundred billion dollars propping up the financial system, and we already have one pricey stimulus on the books.

✳ *For more on the battle to fix our economy, check out Noam Scheiber's* ***THE STASH*** *at www.tnr.com*

The biggest problem facing the Clintonites back in 1993 was arguably political: The bond market assumed the first Democratic president in twelve years would unleash a wave of pent-up spending. Long-term interest rates stayed stubbornly high as a result. Hence the theory, embraced by Clinton adviser Robert Rubin (and another Clinton economic aide named Larry Summers), that a credible plan for deficit reduction could chip away at long-term rates and boost the economy. The Clintonites were gambling, in effect, that deficit reduction could itself be a form of stimulus because of the unique historical moment—that they might not have to choose between the two. Sure enough, interest rates abruptly fell (though inflation did, too) and the '90s boom commenced.

Alas, there's no such win-win solution this time around—among other things, there's little room for historically low rates to fall much more—meaning the only way to further stimulate the economy is to spend. "Now is not the time politically or economically to emphasize fiscal austerity," says Simon Rosenberg, president of NDN, a Washington think tank. "That day will come."

Rosenberg is surely right about the need to punt for the moment on the deficit. But it turns out that this choice is only the beginning of the discussion, not the end. Worse, it's a discussion that rapidly degenerates into a giant catch-22. Take, for example, the fact that spending more money now could actually raise long-term rates, thereby offsetting its stimulative effect. "The reality is that it's not too hard to find a Wall Street analyst that says a second stimulus basically cancels itself out almost immediately because of the impact at this stage on government financing costs," says one senior administration official.

On paper, the way to deal with this is to spend now while pledging to cut later on, so as to persuade the bond market that the infusion is temporary. "Everyone would of course like to be able to do something substantial on jobs in the short term and lock in tough, fiscally responsible policies in the medium term," says a second administration official. But actually executing this fiscal maneuver is unspeakably difficult.

Consider the political context: "The odds that you could get both done in an election year with ten percent unemployment are mighty low," says this official. It would be hard enough to rally liberals around the cause of deficit reduction so soon after the deepest recession in 70 years; getting the GOP on board would be hopeless. Already, Republicans have shamelessly highlighted Medicare cuts in order to derail health care reform, even though they pale alongside the cuts the GOP touted in last year's presidential campaign. It's not hard to imagine conservatives attacking cuts to Medicare or Social Security (or, alternatively, tax increases) when the goal is something as abstract as deficit reduction and Democrats can't deflect the abuse with a benefit like health care.

But, as it happens, politics may not even be the binding constraint. "Even if you had an autocracy and could X out the politics, getting it right substantively is enormously challenging," says Orin Kramer, a hedge-fund manager and prominent Obama supporter. Probably the biggest complicating factor is that the public isn't a passive actor in all this. If the administration were to announce, say, a $200 billion job-creation bill along with a tough deficit-reduction package beginning in three or four years, anticipation of the latter could undercut the former. The reason: People who think their taxes will get raised typically save more and consume less. And, of course, the whole point of additional stimulus is to goose consumption.

The job facing the administration over the next several weeks is to massage these contradictions, a process that's been unfolding in a more public way on Capitol Hill. Allen Sinai, a private-sector economist with close ties to the House leadership, has advised Democrats to pair a short-term stimulus with a new tax on financial transactions, which would pass by the average consumer largely unnoticed. But administration officials worry that a tax would simply push many of these transactions offshore, netting little income and hurting the financial sector. Moderate Democrats like North Dakota Senator Kent

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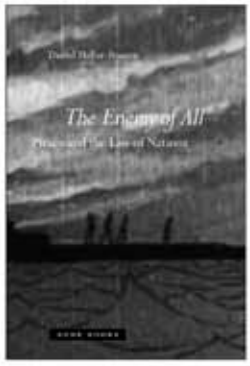

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Conrad favor setting up a commission to hash out future spending cuts and tax reforms in order to narrow the deficit. The idea would be to let the commission work through next year, then put its proposal to an up-or-down vote after the midterm elections. But no one knows how seriously the bond market would treat that sort of deferred abnegation.

One partial fix is to pay for an additional stimulus using savings from TARP, the $700 billion financial bailout. Obama himself nodded at this idea in his December 8 speech on the economy, noting that the administration now expects TARP to be $200 billion cheaper than anticipated as recently as August. "This gives us a chance to pay down the deficit faster than we thought possible and to shift funds … to help create jobs on Main Street," the president said. But, while the extra bailout money is clearly helpful, it hardly solves the stimulus-deficit tension. The markets have to some extent already priced the savings into the deficit and are still registering anxiety. The day of the speech, Moody's released a report identifying the United States and the U.K. as the only two triple-A rated countries whose debts are at risk (albeit remote) of a downgrade. The key, the agency said, would be a "credible fiscal consolidation strategy" that avoids stifling growth. Sound familiar?

Within the administration, White House budget director Peter Orszag appears to have settled on another solution. Last month, Orszag raised eyebrows when word leaked that he'd asked most cabinet agencies to prepare two budgets: one that freezes spending, the other that cuts it by 5 percent. Many congressional liberals were livid, and, according to multiple sources, Larry Summers's National Economic Council reacted negatively to the emphasis on the deficit. ("The economic team has a healthy debate about most major issues," says an administration official. "Getting people back to work is central to addressing the deficit. Similarly, putting the country back on a fiscally sustainable path is vital to confidence in the economy.") The concern among wonks outside the administration is that clamping down on domestic discretionary spending without touching entitlements would take money out of the economy in the short term while doing nothing to close the long-term deficit.

These same liberals and wonks rejoiced when Obama backed job creation. But there is a logic to Orszag's gambit, which runs roughly as follows: It's almost certain that Congress will pass, and the president will sign, a jobs bill early next year, probably in the neighborhood of $100 billion to $200 billion. Given that, and given the difficulty of doing anything about the long-term deficit next year, the administration needs some signal to U.S. bondholders that it takes the deficit seriously. Just not so seriously that it undercuts the extra stimulus.

The Orszag approach just might accomplish that. Given the amount of domestic discretionary spending in the federal budget—about $700 billion this fiscal year—we're talking about cuts of, at most, several tens of billions of dollars if Orszag holds the line on spending (and probably less once Congress weighs in). Which means the cuts wouldn't come close to offsetting the likely stimulus. But they just might buy some credibility in the bond market, which could defer the day when the real deficit cutting has to start. "It's a little bit of form over substance," says Michael Granoff, a money manager who served on the advisory council of the Brookings-based Hamilton Project when Orszag ran it. "But, if you show resolve, that you care about this stuff, it gets into the psychology of bond traders." The laws of psychology may prove easier to finesse than the laws of economics.

Noam Scheiber

Slander

Meet the Ann Coulter of Pakistan.

In late August, a couple of weeks after a U.S. drone strike incinerated Baitullah Mehsud, leader of the Pakistani Taliban, the country's most popular televised chat show, "Capital Talk," hosted a panel to discuss national security. Among the guests was a squat, middle-aged woman with short black hair, streaked with silver dye, named Shireen Mazari. A defense analyst and public intellectual, Mazari is known for her hawkish nationalism—and deep suspicions of India and the United States. Her presence in the studio suggested that, despite the enormous threat her country faced from homegrown terrorists, the conversation that night wouldn't center around Mehsud or the Pakistani Taliban.

Instead, over the course of the next half hour, the panel discussed reports that Blackwater, the North Carolina–based defense contractor that recently changed its name to Xe Services, was operating in Pakistan. Hamid Mir, the host of "Capital Talk," showed video footage of Islamabad's most expensive neighborhoods, featuring multi-story villas with high walls and satellite dishes. The homes looked like any other on the street. But red arrows, superimposed on the screen, pointed to allegedly incriminating electrical generators and surveillance cameras perched atop the walls. "American undercover people are coming," Mazari said. "They are renting homes, and Blackwater is providing security, running death squads and assassination squads … It is an occupation, by default."

Mazari's hunt for American spies and undercover defense contractors was only getting started. In September, she was named editor of *The Nation*, an English-language daily often described as "Fox News in Pakistan." (Earlier this year, one columnist dubbed Mazari the "Ann Coulter of Pakistan.") Throughout the fall, *The Nation* has published multiple front-page stories on the location of new "Blackwater dens" around Islamabad. It featured a news story last month titled "MYSTERIOUS US NATIONALS," which described "two suspicious foreigners wandering in the guise of journalists … [who] seemingly belonged to the US spy agency CIA." The proof? That they "were driven towards the US Consulate." (The "mysterious US nationals" turned out to be an English freelance photographer and an Australian photographer who works for Getty.)

The low point, however, came a couple of weeks earlier, when *The Nation* fronted a story titled "JOURNALISTS AS SPIES IN FATA?"—a reference to Pakistan's federally administered tribal areas—that cited anonymous law enforcement sources accusing Matthew Rosenberg, an American correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, of working as a "chief operative" for the CIA, Blackwater, and the Mossad. "We put in a question mark," said Mazari, referring to the punctuation at the end of the headline, when I asked her whether she realized she was endangering Rosenberg's life. (Daniel Pearl, also a *Journal* reporter, was kidnapped in Karachi in early 2002, accused of being a CIA agent, and beheaded.)

In the war against Al Qaeda and the Taliban, the United States and Pakistan are ostensibly on the same side. But, as the Obama administration prepares to pour tens of thousands of new troops into Afghanistan, it faces a daunting array of challenges from its allies in Islamabad. Perhaps none is as disturbing as the anti-Americanism that is being fueled by Pakistan's mainstream media. In a twisted development, most Pakistanis now view the United States as their greatest threat and enemy, usurping a place that India seemed primed to occupy eternally. And Mazari, who

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holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University, may represent the vanguard of a well-educated, English-speaking, secular elite increasingly charged with hypernationalism and antipathy toward the United States. Mixing fact with demagoguery, and sometimes outright fiction, she represents yet another obstacle to Washington's war on the Taliban.

For most of the past decade, Shireen Mazari wrote a regular column in *The News*, a popular English-language newspaper owned by the largest private media conglomerate in Pakistan. The country does not exactly have a free press—this fall, Reporters Without Borders ranked Pakistan in the bottom 10 percent of its Press Freedom Index, squeezed between Uzbekistan and Equatorial Guinea—but there is no shortage of dissenting opinions aired on any of the country's myriad private TV channels. Over the past couple of years, much of the commentariat's energy has gone into denouncing President Asif Ali Zardari and U.S. foreign policy. It's an effort that Mazari, whose articles often criticize the country's civilian leadership and breathlessly recount CIA plots to dismember Pakistan and seize its nuclear weapons, has played a large part in leading.

I first met Mazari in 2006, when I was a visiting scholar at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI), a foreign ministry–funded think tank. She was the head of the institute, and I was in the country as a freelance journalist, but, at dinner parties, Mazari often introduced me as her "resident CIA agent"—a joke that's never really funny and grew awfully uncomfortable over time. Eventually, in January 2008, I was expelled from Pakistan following months of reporting in Taliban-affected parts of the country. Last month, in a TV interview, Mazari said, "There is a history of American journalists misbehaving in Pakistan," after which she mentioned my travels to supposedly off-limits regions and added, "Eventually, he had to be deported."

Far from being on the fringes of Pakistani society, Mazari is something of an establishment figure. She was appointed director general of the institute by Pervez Musharraf's government not long after the general seized power in an October 1999 coup. In subsequent years, Mazari says she enjoyed considerable influence within Musharraf's circles, and those ties, combined with her writing, have led to charges that she is merely a pawn for Pakistan's military and intelligence agencies, which remain critical of U.S. power and are critical of Zardari's floundering attempts at governance. "It's quite obvious that her views are in consonance with people in the agencies," explained Arif Nizami, the former editor of *The Nation*, who led the paper from 1986 until this September, when Mazari took over. "She's let loose by certain people in the agencies who would like to see the pot burning," said an acquaintance of Mazari's in Islamabad. "She's just a mouthpiece."

That doesn't mean that Mazari's charges are all without merit. There is, of course, a U.S. military and intelligence presence in Pakistan, and, two weeks ago, the New York-based liberal magazine *The Nation*—no relation to its Pakistani namesake—published a lengthy article alleging the activities of Xe/Blackwater in Pakistan on behalf of the U.S. military. Xe and the U.S. government deny the charges, but, when I spoke with Mazari soon after, she said, "I certainly feel vindicated." She later added, "Our interests and the Americans' interests don't coincide."

During Hillary Clinton's recent visit to Pakistan, the secretary of state spent much time arguing that U.S. and Pakistani interests did, in fact, coincide. To a cynical questioner who believed that Pakistan was fighting America's war, Clinton replied, "We have a common enemy." Indeed, in the past six months alone, the Pakistani Taliban has exploded bombs in Islamabad; attacked police and military sites in Punjab; overrun the Army General Headquarters in Rawalpindi; and bombed sites throughout Peshawar. More than 400 people have been killed in terrorist attacks since October. Behind closed doors, senior Pakistani leaders seem to realize the threat, which is why Islamabad accepts U.S. anti-terrorism efforts, silently condoning the drone strikes, for example, while condemning them for public effect. Mazari's objections—like those of many other Pakistanis—are certainly understandable, but the reckless, oftentimes unsubstantiated way in which Mazari presents them only deepens the so-called "trust deficit" between the two countries.

In August, for example, Mazari wrote that an American citizen named Craig Davis had been arrested in Peshawar and deported because of his alleged ties to Creative Associates, a government contractor that she dubbed the "central organization" for U.S.-funded "suspicious, covert operations" in Pakistan. "Clearly there is a threatening US agenda seeking out our nuclear sites and assassinating people, thereby adding to our chaos and violence," she continued. Weeks later, she wrote that Davis was back in the country. The U.S. Embassy objected to the story, and *The News*'s editorial-page editor went back and fact-checked the column. Some of Mazari's assertions—Davis had not, in fact, been deported—didn't check out. So, before her next column ran, the editor opted to hold the piece an extra day and show it to a lawyer. In the interim, Mazari announced that she was taking the job as editor of *The Nation*, though not before accusing the U.S. ambassador, Anne Patterson, of interfering with Pakistan's free press. (It wasn't the first time Mazari had accused the Americans of disrupting her career. When the Pakistan People's Party won elections in 2008, they promptly removed her from her position at the ISSI, a development for which she also blamed Patterson.)

Mazari and *The Nation*, though smaller than *The News*, were a perfect fit; *The Nation*'s publisher has advocated nuking India and is also noted for his conspiracy-mongering. Since taking over, Mazari claims that the paper has been "seeing a big revival," with circulation having "jumped up tremendously." According to both Pakistanis and Pakistan-watchers, *The Nation* has become a right-wing outlet like Fox News. But Hamid Mir, the host of "Capital Talk," cautioned against making the comparison—for fear of it becoming a self-fulfilling prophesy. "*The Nation* is not very big and not very influential," he said. "If *The Nation* becomes Fox News, then Pakistan will burn."

Already, the Taliban have seized on the propaganda opportunity that Mazari has opened. When a bomb ripped through a Peshawar market in late October, killing more than 100 people, the Taliban, increasingly concerned about alienating the Pakistani public, refused to take credit for the blast. Instead, Mehsud's successor, the Fu Manchu–styled Hakimullah Mehsud, blamed Blackwater. If that line becomes accepted, then not only will Pakistan continue to burn, but the U.S.-Pakistan relationship may burn along with it.

NICHOLAS SCHMIDLE

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ANTHONY RUSSO

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The Battle for Tora Bora

How Osama bin Laden slipped from our grasp: the definitive account.

PETER BERGEN

An American pilot protested a possible 8 a.m. Al Qaeda surrender by drawing a giant "8" in the sky, followed by the word "ON."

AP PHOTO/DAVID GUTTENFELDER

FOUR DAYS BEFORE the fall of Kabul in November 2001, Osama bin Laden was still in town. The Al Qaeda leader's movements before and after September 11 are difficult to trace precisely, but, just prior to the attacks, we know that he appeared in Kandahar and urged his followers to evacuate to safer locations in anticipation of U.S. retaliation. Then, on November 8, he was in Kabul, despite the fact that U.S. forces and their Afghan allies were closing in on the city. That morning, while eating a meal of meat and olives, he gave an interview to Hamid Mir, a Pakistani journalist who was writing his biography. He defended the attacks on New York and Washington, saying, "America and its allies are massacring us in Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir, and Iraq. The Muslims have the right to attack America in reprisal." Six months later, when I met Mir in Pakistan, he told me that the Al Qaeda leader had, on that day, appeared to be in remarkably good spirits.

Kabul fell on November 12, and bin Laden, along with other Al Qaeda leaders, fled to Jalalabad, a compact city in eastern Afghanistan surrounded by lush fruit groves. (He was quite familiar with the area, having maintained a compound in a Jalalabad suburb in the 1990s.) Tracking bin Laden closely was Gary Berntsen, a bear-sized CIA officer with a pronounced Long Island accent, who arrived in Kabul on the day it fell. Berntsen had been serving in Latin America on September 11 when he was yanked to run the CIA's fast-moving ground operations in Afghanistan. It was a perfect job for an operative with a distinctly independent and aggressive style.

By November 14, Berntsen was receiving a stream of intelligence reports from the Northern Alliance that the Al Qaeda leader was in Jalalabad, giving pep talks to an ever-growing caravan of fighters. Berntsen dispatched an eight-man CIA team to the city. To provide them with local guides, he made contact with Hazarat Ali—an Afghan commander, longtime opponent of the Taliban, and nose-picking semi-illiterate. Ali sent three teenaged fighters to escort the U.S. team into Jalalabad,

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which was now crawling with fleeing Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters.

But bin Laden wasn't in Jalalabad for long. Following the fall of Kabul, Jalalabad descended into chaos; no one was in charge for at least a week. Abdullah Tabarak, a Moroccan who is alleged to be one of bin Laden's bodyguards, reportedly told interrogators that, during the month of Ramadan, which began on November 17, bin Laden and his top deputy, Egyptian surgeon Ayman Al Zawahiri, left Jalalabad and headed about 30 miles south. Their destination was Tora Bora, a series of mountain caves near the Pakistani border. Berntsen's team remained one step behind them, for now.

Tora Bora was not yet a familiar name to many Americans. But what would unfold there over the subsequent days remains, eight years later, the single most consequential battle of the war on terrorism. Presented with an opportunity to kill or capture Al Qaeda's top leadership just three months after September 11, the United States was instead outmaneuvered by bin Laden, who slipped into Pakistan, largely disappeared from U.S. radar, and slowly began rebuilding his organization.

What really happened at Tora Bora? Not long after the battle ended, the answer to that question would become extremely clouded. Americans perceived the Afghan war as a stunning victory, and the failure at Tora Bora seemed like an unfortunate footnote to an otherwise upbeat story. By 2004, with George W. Bush locked in a tough reelection battle, some U.S. officials were even asserting, inaccurately, that bin Laden himself may not have been present at the battle.

The real history of Tora Bora is far more disturbing. Having reconstructed the battle—based on interviews with the top American ground commander, three Afghan commanders, and three CIA officials; accounts by Al Qaeda eyewitnesses that were subsequently published on jihadist websites; recollections of captured survivors who were later questioned by interrogators or reporters; an official history of the Afghan war by the U.S. Special Operations Command; an investigation by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and visits to the battle sites themselves—I am convinced that Tora Bora constitutes one of the greatest military blunders in recent U.S. history. It is worth revisiting now not just in the interest of historical accuracy, but also because the story contains valuable lessons as we renew our push against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

It was no accident that bin Laden had chosen to retreat to Tora Bora. He knew the place well. Huthaifa Azzam, a Jordanian who was close to bin Laden during the anti-Soviet jihad, when both were crossing back and forth between Pakistan and Afghanistan, recalls that, in 1987, the Al Qaeda leader used bulldozers from his family's construction company to build a road through the mountains. The aim was to allow for the movement of his Arab fighters from his base at Jaji, near the Pakistani border, to Jalalabad, then occupied by the Soviets. Bin Laden spent more than six months building the road.

That year, bin Laden engaged Soviet forces in a battle at Jaji. He joined about 50 other Arab fighters in managing to hold off a much larger group of Soviet soldiers. Jaji received considerable attention in the Arab world, and, for the first time, bin Laden was widely seen not as a mere financier of jihad but also as a successful military commander. After a week, bin Laden was forced to retreat from Jaji. But the battle was arguably a resounding victory for the future Al Qaeda leader, as he burnished his image—and lived to fight another day.

During the years leading up to September 11, bin Laden maintained a mountain retreat in a settlement near Tora Bora called Milawa—a three-hour drive up a narrow mud-and-stone road from Jalalabad. The buildings that made up the settlement were strung across ridges that, in winter, lay far above the snow line, commanding striking views of the expanses below. They included a series of scattered lookout posts, a bakery, and bin Laden's two-bedroom house, all built of the baked mud and stone that typifies Afghan villages. Next to the house was a rudimentary swimming pool. Spread in front of it was a broad field—today scarred by massive bomb craters—where Al Qaeda members cultivated crops. From bin Laden's home, all he could see was his own fiefdom; the nearest village was thousands of feet below and out of sight.

In the winter of 1996, the Al Qaeda leader took Abdel Bari Atwan, a Palestinian journalist based in London, on a walking tour of a frigid Tora Bora. "I really feel secure in the mountains," he told Atwan. "I really enjoy my life when I'm here." Bin Laden sat for photos with Atwan in the Tora Bora caves. He surely understood that the setting would have a certain resonance in the Muslim world, since it was in a mountain cave that the Prophet Muhammad first received the revelations of the Koran.

According to his son, Omar, bin Laden would routinely hike from Tora Bora into neighboring Pakistan on walks that could take anywhere between seven and 14 hours. "My brothers and I all loathed these grueling treks that seemed the most pleasant of outings to our father," Omar bin Laden later recalled. Bin Laden told his sons they had to memorize every rock on the routes to Pakistan. "We never know when war will strike," he instructed them. "We must know our way out of the mountains."

Now bin Laden had chosen Tora Bora as the place for his climactic confrontation with the United States. Fouad Al Rabia—a Kuwait Airways engineer, then in his mid-forties, who was in Afghanistan on something of a religious vacation—was with Al Qaeda when the group retreated from Jalalabad to Tora Bora. "Simply being out on the street was an invitation to be killed," he later told officials at Guantánamo. "We walked from there to the baseline edge of the mountains. . . . This was an escape route to get out of the country, because it is the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. That was the only way to get out."

At least five Guantánamo detainees have given eyewitness accounts of bin Laden's presence at Tora Bora. Typical of this group is Sulaiman Al Nahdi, a 27-year-old Yemeni who explained that he saw bin Laden "in a valley that was downward of the mountains," where he "talked about the jihad for approximately one hour," after which Ayman Al Zawahiri "made a few comments." Similarly, Khaled Qasim, a 24-year-old Yemeni, was in the mountains in November 2001 when he saw bin Laden. The Al Qaeda leader, Qasim recalled, "was passing by and just said 'hi' and went on his way."

Khalid Al Hubayshi, a Saudi explosives expert, was in the Tora Bora trenches as the Al Qaeda leader prepared for his showdown with the United States. Bin Laden, Hubayshi told *The Washington Post*, "was convinced" that American soldiers would land in the mountains. "We spent five weeks like that, manning our positions in case the Americans landed," he recalled.

As bin Laden set about preparing for a U.S. maneuver that never came, Gary Berntsen's team remained on his trail. Several days after arriving in Jalalabad, the group moved into a schoolhouse in the foothills near Tora Bora, which they used as a base. Berntsen's sources on the ground continued to tell him that bin Laden was in the area.

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At the end of November, the team of eight decided to split into two groups of four, one of which would head farther into the mountains with ten Afghan fighters as guides. The team's members included an Air Force combat controller who specialized in calling in airstrikes, and they took with them a laser capable of "painting" targets with a signal that U.S. bombers could then lock onto. The expedition was delayed when a poorly packed RPG carried on a mule blew up, killing two of the Afghan guides. Finally, the group reached a mountaintop from which it could see several hundred of bin Laden's men arrayed below. For the following 56 hours straight, the team called in airstrikes from all of the bombers available in theater.

Berntsen had not asked anyone for permission to begin the battle of Tora Bora. About 24 hours after the airstrikes had begun, Berntsen's supervisor, Hank Crumpton, head of counterterrorism special operations at the CIA, called him and asked, "Are you conducting a battle in Tora Bora?" Not quite knowing what his boss's reaction might be, Berntsen simply said, "Yes." Crumpton replied, "Congratulations! Good job!"

As the fighting got underway, bin Laden initially sought to project an easy confidence to his men. Abu Bakr, a Kuwaiti who was at Tora Bora, said that, early in the battle, he saw bin Laden at the checkpoint he was manning. The Al Qaeda leader sat with some of his foot soldiers for half an hour, drinking a cup of tea and telling them, "Don't worry. Don't lose your morale, and fight strong. I'm here. I'm always asking about you guys."

But, despite Al Qaeda's arsenal of rockets, tanks, machine guns, and artillery, its position was becoming perilous. At altitudes of up to 14,000 feet above sea level, Tora Bora's thin air provides a tough environment at any time of year—and, in December, temperatures drop to well below zero at night. As the battle raged in the mountains, snow was falling steadily. What's more, it was Ramadan, and the ultra-religious members of Al Qaeda were likely observing the fast from dawn to dusk. Meanwhile, U.S. bombs rained down on the snow-covered peaks unceasingly, preventing sleep. Between December 4 and 7 alone, U.S. bombers dropped 700,000 pounds of ordnance on the mountains.

Ayman Saeed Abdullah Batarfi, a Yemeni doctor who was treating the Al Qaeda wounded, believed that the situation was growing untenable. "I was out of medicine and I had a lot of casualties," Batarfi later told the Associated Press. "I did a hand amputation by a knife, and I did a finger amputation with scissors." Batarfi said he personally told bin Laden that, if they did not leave Tora Bora soon, "no one would stay alive" under the U.S. bombardment. But the Al Qaeda leader seemed mainly preoccupied with his own escape. "He did not prepare himself for Tora Bora," Batarfi said, "and, to be frank, he didn't care about anyone but himself."

Bin Laden recounted his experiences at Tora Bora on an audiotape that aired on Al Jazeera in 2003. He recalled that, on the morning of December 3, heavy U.S. bombing began around the clock, with B-52s dropping some 20 to 30 bombs each. "American forces were bombing us by smart bombs that weigh thousands of pounds and bombs that penetrate caves," bin Laden said.

On December 9, a U.S. plane dropped an immense BLU-82 bomb on Al Qaeda's positions. Known as a Daisy Cutter, the 15,000-pound bomb was used in the Gulf war to clear minefields. Berntsen remembers that the Daisy Cutter was followed by a wave of additional U.S. airstrikes. "We came right in behind it with B-52s," he says. "Like three or four of them. . . . Each of them has twenty-five five-hundred-pounders, so everything goes in there. Killed a lot of people. A lot of bad guys." That night, Al Qaeda member Abu Jaafar Al Kuwaiti and others "were awak-

Nik Schulz/L-Dopa

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ened to the sound of massive and terrorizing explosions very near to us." The following day, he later recounted on an Al Qaeda website, he "received the horrifying news" that the "trench of Sheik Osama had been destroyed."

But bin Laden was not dead. A subsequent account on an Al Qaeda website offered an explanation of how he saved himself: Bin Laden had dreamed about a scorpion descending into one of the trenches that his men had dug, so he evacuated his trench. A day or so later, it was destroyed by a bomb.

The United States appeared to have Al Qaeda on the ropes. But, on the U.S. side, all was not well. A dispute was raging among officials about how to conduct the battle. By late November, Crumpton—a soft-spoken Georgian widely regarded as one of the most effective CIA officers of his generation—feared that bin Laden might try to escape Tora Bora. He explained this to Bush and Cheney personally at the White House and presented satellite imagery showing that the Pakistani military did not have its side of the border covered. CIA Director George Tenet remembers Bush asking Crumpton if the Pakistanis had enough troops to seal the border. "No, sir," the CIA veteran replied. "No one has enough troops to prevent any possibility of escape in a region like that." Still, Crumpton thought the United States should try—and that meant more troops would be required.

Back in Kabul, Berntsen was thinking along the same lines. On the evening of December 3, one member of his team, a former Delta Force operator who had gone deep into Tora Bora, came to the Afghan capital to brief Berntsen about the lay of the land. He told Berntsen that taking out Al Qaeda's hard core would require 800 Rangers, elite soldiers who had gone through the Army's most rigorous physical training. That night, Berntsen sent a lengthy message to CIA headquarters asking for 800 Rangers to assault the complex of caves where bin Laden and his lieutenants were believed to be hiding, and to block their escape routes. Crumpton says, "I remember the message. I remember talking not only to Gary every day, but to some of his men who were *at* Tora Bora. Directly. And their request could not have been more direct, more clear, more certain: that we needed U.S. troops there. More men on the ground."

That bin Laden was at Tora Bora was not, by this point, a secret. *The New York Times* had reported it on November 25. Four days later, when asked by ABC News whether the Al Qaeda leader was at Tora Bora, Dick Cheney said, "I think he's probably in that general area."

Meanwhile, the additional forces that Crumpton and Berntsen were requesting were certainly available. There were around 2,000 U.S. troops in or near the Afghan theater at the time. At the U.S. airbase known as K2 in Uzbekistan were stationed some 1,000 soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division, whose specialty is fighting in harsh terrain. Hundreds of those soldiers had already deployed to Bagram Air Force Base, 40 miles north of Kabul. In addition, 1,200 Marines were stationed at Forward Operating Base Rhino, near Kandahar, from the last week of November onward. Brigadier General James Mattis, the commander of the Marines in the Afghan theater, reportedly asked to send his men into Tora Bora, but his request was turned down. In the end, there were more journalists—about 100, according to Nic Robertson of CNN and Susan Glasser of *The Washington Post*, who both covered the battle—in and around Tora Bora than there were Western soldiers.

Fury was almost certainly closer to bin Laden than any American soldier had been—but now, he was in a quandary.

Yet, when Crumpton called General Tommy Franks to ask for more troops, Franks pushed back. The general, who had overall control of the Tora Bora operation, pointed out that the light-footprint approach—U.S. reliance on local proxies—had already succeeded in overthrowing the Taliban, and he argued that it would take time to get more U.S. troops to Tora Bora.

The U.S. force was to remain tiny throughout the battle. On December 7, on-the-ground responsibility for Tora Bora passed from Berntsen to a 37-year-old major in the elite and secretive Delta Force, who would later write a memoir using the pen name Dalton Fury. Under Fury's command during the battle were 40 Delta operators from the "black" Special Forces, 14 Green Berets from the less secretive "white" Special Forces, six CIA operatives, a few Air Force specialists, including signals operators, and a dozen British commandos from the elite Special Boat Service. They were joined by three main Afghan commanders: Hajji Zaman Gamsharik, who had been living in exile in the comfortable environs of Dijon, France, before he returned to Afghanistan as the Taliban fell; Hajji Zahir, the 27-year-old son of a Jalalabad warlord; and Ali, the commander who had been helping Berntsen. The Afghan commanders disliked each other more than they did Al Qaeda. "For the most important mission to date in the global war on terror," Fury later wrote, "our nation was relying on a fractious bunch of AK-47-toting lawless bandits and tribal thugs who were not bound by any recognized rules of warfare."

Why was the Pentagon so unwilling to send more troops? Recently, I asked Franks to comment on his decision. He reiterated his preference for a light footprint and his concern about the time it would take to put additional troops on the ground. He also said that he could not be sure that bin Laden was at Tora Bora because of "conflicting intelligence" that alternately placed him in Kashmir, around Kandahar, and near the Afghan-Iranian border.

Lt. General Michael DeLong, Franks's top deputy, recalled in his 2004 memoir that the Pentagon did not want to put many American soldiers on the ground because of a concern that they would be treated like antibodies by the locals. "The mountains of Tora Bora are situated deep in territory controlled by tribes hostile to the United States and any outsiders," he wrote. "The reality is if we put our troops in there we would inevitably end up fighting Afghan villagers—creating bad will at a sensitive time—which was the last thing we wanted to do."

There may also have been a reluctance to send soldiers into harm's way. The Pentagon's risk aversion is now hard to recall following the years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq and the thousands of American soldiers who have died—but it was quite real. In the most recent U.S. war—the 1999 conflict in Kosovo—not a single American had been killed in combat. And, at that point in the Afghan war, more journalists had died than American soldiers. Fury says that the 14 Green Berets who were on the ground at Tora Bora from the "white" Special Forces were told to "stay well short of even the foothills," some four kilometers from any action—"pretty much out of harm's way." The Green Berets did call in airstrikes but were not allowed to engage in firefights with Al Qaeda because of

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concerns that the battle would turn into a "meat grinder."

Then there was Iraq. In late November, Donald Rumsfeld told Franks that Bush "wants us to look for options in Iraq." Rumsfeld instructed the general to "dust off" the Pentagon's blueprint for an Iraq invasion and brief him in a week's time. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Richard Myers would later write, "I realized that one week was not giving Tom and his staff much time to sharpen" the plan. Franks points out in his autobiography that his staff was already working seven days a week, 16-plus hours a day, as the Tora Bora battle was reaching its climax. Although Franks doesn't say so, it is impossible not to wonder if the labor-intensive planning ordered by his boss for another major war was a distraction from the one he was already fighting.

Franks briefed Rumsfeld and other top Pentagon officials about the war plan for Iraq on December 4. But both men agreed that the plan needed work. Rumsfeld gave Franks and his staff eight days to revise it. "Well, General," he told Franks, "you have a lot of work ahead of you. Today is Tuesday. Let's get together again next Wednesday."

On December 10, American signals-intelligence operators picked up an important intercept from Tora Bora: "Father [bin Laden] is trying to break through the siege line." This was then communicated to the Delta operators on the ground. Around 4 p.m. that same day, Afghan soldiers said they had bin Laden in their sights, according to the official U.S. military history of the battle. Later that evening, Fury received a new piece of signals intelligence on bin Laden's whereabouts. The information was so precise that it appeared to pinpoint the Al Qaeda leader's location to within ten meters. At the time, Fury was in the schoolhouse that he had been using as a base. About 15 minutes later, he received another bit of intelligence—somewhat less precise—placing bin Laden two kilometers from the first location. To this day, Fury doesn't know which information was more recent and therefore more accurate, but he drove into the foothills and got to within about 1,900 meters of the first location.

Fury now found himself in a quandary. This was almost certainly the closest to bin Laden's position U.S. forces had ever been, but, at the same time, three of his men were pinned down in a ferocious firefight with some Al Qaeda foot soldiers. And, as dusk fell, Fury's key Afghan ally, Hazarat Ali, had retreated from the battlefield back home to break his Ramadan fast. Fury was under explicit orders not to take the lead in the battle and only to act in a supporting role for the hundreds of Afghans in Hazarat Ali's ragtag army. Now, he had no Afghan allies to guide him at night into the craggy moonscape of upper Tora Bora. Fury reluctantly made the decision to bail on that night's mission.

Muhammad Musa, who commanded 600 Afghan soldiers at Tora Bora, later said that he was not impressed by the U.S. forces on the ground. "[They] were not involved in the fighting," he said. "There were six American soldiers with us, U.S. Special Forces. They coordinated the air strikes. … My personal view is, if they had blocked the way out to Pakistan, Al Qaeda would not have had a way to escape. The Americans were my guests here, but they didn't know about fighting."

In fact, the five dozen or so Americans on the ground at Tora Bora fought well. There were just far too few of them to cordon off a huge, mountainous area and prevent Al Qaeda from escaping into Pakistan.

An Afghan fighter at Tora Bora following the battle. By December 14, it appeared that bin Laden had escaped.

ROMEO GACAD/AFP/NEWSCOM

December 12 and 13 were eventful days. December 12 was when Franks briefed Rumsfeld on the revised war plans for Iraq. December 13 was the day that Pakistani militants attacked the Indian parliament, raising the possibility of war between two nuclear-armed states. India moved hundreds of thousands of soldiers to its border with Pakistan. "We had to respond," Pakistani Minister of the Interior Moinuddin Haider told me. "All our armed forces went to combat that situation, and we also moved to the borders." Suddenly, Pakistan's attention was diverted away from sealing its northwestern border against an Al Qaeda escape.

As it turned out, December 12 and 13 also marked the defining moment in the battle of Tora Bora. Hajji Zaman, one of the Afghan warlords allied with the United States, had opened negotiations with members of Al Qaeda for a surrender agreement. "They talked on the radio with Hajji Zaman," an Afghan frontline commander told me, "saying they were ready to surrender at four p.m. Commander Zaman told the other commanders and the Americans about this. Then Al Qaeda said, 'We need to have a meeting with our guys. Will you wait until eight a.m. tomorrow?' So we agreed to this."

News of the cease-fire did not sit well with the group of 20 Delta operators who, by December 12, had made their way deeper into Tora Bora, to an area near bin Laden's now-destroyed two-room house. In Kabul, Berntsen went ballistic

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when he heard about the proposed surrender. "Essentially I used the f-word. … I was *screaming* at them on the phone. And telling them, 'No cease-fire. No negotiation. We continue airstrikes.'"

As Fury remembers it, U.S. forces only observed the cease-fire for about two hours on December 12—resuming bombing around 5 p.m. that day. At some point during the episode, an American pilot protested the proposed surrender by drawing a giant "8" in the sky, followed by the word "ON." Zaman's deadline of 8 a.m. came and went on December 13 without any of the militants inside Tora Bora surrendering.

That afternoon, American signals operators picked up bin Laden speaking to his followers. Fury kept a careful log of these communications in his notebook, which he would type up at the end of every day and pass up his chain of command. "The time is now," bin Laden said. "Arm your women and children against the infidel!" Following several hours of high-intensity bombing, the Al Qaeda leader spoke again. Fury paraphrases: "Our prayers have not been answered. Times are dire. We didn't receive support from the apostate nations who call themselves our Muslim brothers." Bin Laden apologized to his men for having involved them in the fight and gave them permission to surrender.

Khalid Al Hubayshi, one of the Saudis holed up in Tora Bora, says that bin Laden's aides instructed the hundreds of mostly Arab fighters who remained alive in the mountainous complex to head to Pakistan and turn themselves in to their embassies. Al Hubayshi is still angry about the behavior of the Al Qaeda leader: "We had been ready to lay down our lives for him, and he couldn't make the effort to speak to us personally," he told journalist Robert Lacey.

The following day, on December 14, bin Laden's voice was again picked up by American signals operators, but, according to the interpreter who was translating for the Delta team, it sounded more like a pre-recorded sermon than a live transmission. It appeared that bin Laden had already left the battlefield area. He had likely used the cover of Al Qaeda's "surrender" to begin his retreat.

Abdullah Tabarak, the Moroccan who was allegedly one of bin Laden's bodyguards, says that the top leaders of Al Qaeda separated as they made their escape to Pakistan. Ayman Al Zawahiri left the mountainous redoubt with Uthman, one of bin Laden's eleven sons. Osama fled with another of his sons, 18-year-old Muhammad, accompanied by his guards. Tabarak continued to use bin Laden's satellite phone as the Al Qaeda leader escaped, on the reasonable assumption that it was being monitored by U.S. intelligence.

By December 17, the battle of Tora Bora was over. Fury estimated that there were some 220 dead militants and 52 captured fighters—mostly Arabs, as well as a dozen Afghans, and a sprinkling of Chechens and Pakistanis. Around 20 of the captured prisoners were paraded for the cameras of the international press. They were a bedraggled, scrawny lot who did not look much like the fearsome warriors everyone assumed them to be.

Ten days later, a videotape surfaced of bin Laden. He appeared to be visibly aged and contemplating his own death. "I am just a poor slave of God," he said. "If I live or die, the war will continue." During the 34-minute video, he did not move his entire left side.

Tora Bora would return, briefly, to the forefront of American politics in 2004. With just over a month to go before election day, John Kerry attacked President Bush for failing to capture bin Laden at Tora Bora. Franks, who had by this point retired from the military (and who would go on to join the boards of Bank of America and Chuck E. Cheese's), retorted several weeks later with a *New York Times* op-ed, writing, "We don't know to this day whether Mr. bin Laden was at Tora Bora." Cheney weighed in the same day, calling Kerry's criticisms "absolute garbage." On October 27, Bush said Kerry's remarks about the battle were part of a "pattern of saying anything it takes to get elected."

Kerry remains furious about Tora Bora today. "They declared Osama bin Laden the world's number-one criminal, and went out boldly proclaiming, 'Wanted: Dead or Alive' and talking about the dangers of Al Qaeda," he told me recently. "And when they had an opportunity to completely, not only decapitate it, but probably to leave it with the minuscule, last portion of its tail, they never showed up." His anger is justified. Bin Laden was clearly at Tora Bora, and sending so few troops was indeed a major failure. It's a lesson that bears remembering today as the United States continues to pursue Islamist militants in both Afghanistan and Pakistan: In the hunt for members of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, there is simply no substitute for boots on the ground. Afghan proxies, Pakistani soldiers, drones—these are not unimportant tools in the war on terrorism. But they are not effective substitutes for U.S. troops. If we want to kill bin Laden and Zawahiri—and other top Al Qaeda leaders—we are probably going to have to do it ourselves.

The major participants in the battle of Tora Bora have long since moved on with their lives—Fury and Berntsen both retired and wrote books; Crumpton left the CIA and became the Bush State Department's coordinator for counterterrorism—yet the sense that something went very wrong in late 2001 has not left them. Fury is haunted by the moment on December 10 when bin Laden may have been less than 2,000 meters away. In his memoir, he wrote that the incident "still bothers me. In some ways, I can't suppress the feeling of somehow letting down our nation at a critical time." Earlier this month, he elaborated: "It's a tough stigma to live with and one I wouldn't wish on anyone."

As for bin Laden: If his 1987 escape at Jaji created his mythic persona, then his 2001 escape from Tora Bora helped to cement it. While he no longer presides over Al Qaeda as directly as he once did, there can be little doubt that he remains its general guide—and that he played a key role in rejuvenating the organization after 2001. Still, in 2005, the CIA shuttered Alec Station, the unit that had been tasked with hunting bin Laden and Al Qaeda's other top leaders for the previous decade. The analysts and officers were reassigned to other missions. Today, most informed observers believe bin Laden is in or near Pakistan's North West Frontier Province on the Afghan border, perhaps in Bajaur or Chitral. But the fact is, as a longtime American intelligence analyst puts it, "there is very limited collection on him personally." That's spook-speak for a blunt truth: We haven't a clue where he is.

The Al Qaeda leader, who is now nearing his fifty-third birthday, has released several audio recordings in recent years, but the last time he was seen on video was in September 2007. In the course of a long statement that touched on everything from the Kennedy assassination to taxes, he taunted the United States for "being the greatest economic power and possessing the most powerful and up-to-date military arsenal," yet failing to stop the September 11 attacks. His once-graying beard had been dyed jet black. He looked healthy and rested and confident, like a man who had been granted a new lease on life and was planning to make the most of it. ◆

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Adios, Monroe Doctrine

When the Yanquis go home.

JORGE G. CASTAÑEDA

The ouster of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya has provided Latin America with a revelatory moment. Beginning with the Monroe Doctrine—and extending through countless invasions, occupations, and covert operations—Washington has considered the region its backyard. So where was this superpower these past few months, as Honduras hung in the balance? More or less sitting on its hands. The fact is that the United States is no longer willing, or perhaps even able, to select who governs from Tegucigalpa, or anywhere else in the region for that matter. Looking back at the history of the hemisphere, this fact is remarkable—and certainly transformative. For the first time in centuries, the United States doesn't seem to care much what happens in Latin America.

The roots of the diminishing U.S. presence can be found in the end of the cold war. It's not that the rivalry with the Soviets was the only factor driving U.S. involvement in Latin America. Clearly, James Monroe and Teddy Roosevelt didn't plunge their country deep into the hemisphere out of an anti-communist impulse. But the conclusion of the long struggle with the Soviets sharpened a question that may have long lurked in Washington's subconscious: What national interests, exactly, did the United States have in Latin America?

Of course, it is tempting to view this possible retreat from the region as further evidence of Barack Obama's realist foreign policy. But consider the approach of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. During their administrations, America's grandest policy moves in the hemisphere were in the realm of economic policy—nafta, the Mexican bailout of 1995, cafta. And, when the United States did exert itself militarily, it did so in concert with regional allies—as was the case in Haiti and with Plan Colombia. But since George H.W. Bush's invasion of Panama, there have been no unilateral military interventions, no coup plots or new embargoes, not even the propping up of decaying regimes.

To understand this new passivity, we can examine the two events that have most riled the old critics of imperialism: the Bush administration's alleged complicity in the botched military coup against Hugo Chávez in 2002 and the plans to build a wall along the Mexican border. Both of these events are partly real and largely idle. Even if the coup plotters in Caracas had the tacit approval of the United States, they were almost certainly acting on their own, and sloppily. Meanwhile, the fence has yet to be completed. Recession has abated the human flow northward—and policymakers surely know that a wall will be futile once the economy eventually recovers.

At first, in the case of the Clinton years, this attitude of benign neglect made Washington popular. But then, for reasons having more to do with Iraq and Afghanistan, that popularity evaporated. And, in the end, the rise of anti-Americanism in the region didn't make much of a difference. Chávez has not stopped selling oil to the United States; Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa rants against imperialism but maintains the dollar as his country's national currency, with the Fed's quiet acquiescence.

Of course, the United States still has its critics. Some—the left, mainly—would prefer that it play even less of a role: a unilateral end to the Cuban embargo, immigration reform, voiding the military basing agreement with Colombia. Others—the right, chiefly—have called for further confrontation with Chávez. But, by and large, a strange and centrist hemispheric consensus has emerged in support of U.S. indifference. Therefore, this policy will persist, unless things get nasty.

With the rise of Chavismo, it isn't always possible to see the salutary benefits from this new U.S. policy. But they are tangible. It has grown increasingly difficult for certain regimes to blame Washington for their failures. From Venezuela to Argentina to Bolivia, populist governments have pursued economic and social policies, as well as geopolitical alliances, that can scarcely help their people. When these policies inevitably fail, these governments won't be able to replicate the rhetorical trickery of the Cubans or the Sandinistas. They cannot hold Washington responsible for their setbacks. At best, they can argue that the peasants in the Andes are still hungry because of the presence of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, but that is not an easy sell.

And the change in regional dynamics is even more profound than that. The past decade has seen the rise of governments—like those of Lula in Brazil, Michelle Bachelet and Ricardo Lagos in Chile, and Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay—that have ideological differences with Washington but a strong desire for a good working relationship with it. These governments can fend off the most radical segments of their left-wing constituencies, who frown on any relationship with Washington, by citing the end of U.S. imperialism in the hemisphere. When the so-called "Shiite" faction of Lula's Workers' Party protests against hosting George W. Bush for lunch, he can reply that, whatever one may think of Iraq, Bush did not inflict any harm on Brazil; when Chávez rails against the U.S.-Colombian military agreement, Chile and Uruguay can reasonably respond that, while they may not like the deal, it does not affect them.

This U.S. stance is also a positive development for symbolic reasons. Too much is made about the imperative for U.S. atonement or humility; they are both overrated. Nonetheless, the United States does carry baggage in the region, and the history of its engagement with Latin America is not a proud one. Breaking with that past, at least by not repeating it, is a good idea and wins points in most quarters of the hemisphere. There is a legitimate debate about the motivations for U.S. intervention in Latin America, as well as its consequences. But placing that history behind us allows for a relationship stripped of the rhetorically strident and often vapid atmospherics of the past.

Unfortunately, this new strategic environment is precarious. Over the long run, the U.S. policy of benign neglect stands a good chance of isolating Hugo Chávez. But such policy depends on turning the other cheek—and perseverance in turning the other cheek depends largely on

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the intensity and frequency of the slaps one receives.

The least-dangerous threat posed by Venezuela and its allies is economic: that companies will be nationalized without compensation; that a gradual drop in Venezuelan oil exports to the U.S. Gulf Coast will turn precipitous; that defaulting debt will trigger a regional financial crisis. None of these scenarios would be the end of the world, but Barack Obama could hardly pursue his jocular attitude toward Chávez if they materialized. Another danger lies in the Caracas caudillo's domestic policies. If he goes too far in muzzling the press, intimidating the opposition, and tampering with the electoral process or the courts, Washington will find itself unable to ignore his authoritarian crackdown.

But it's Chávez's foreign activities that could prove most menacing. For now, his partnership with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is more bluster than substance. The idea that the two dictators' countries can truly help each other, given their economic similarities, is far-fetched. But it is possible to imagine situations in which Chávez would lend Iran a truly destabilizing hand. If Tehran faces trade sanctions, especially an embargo on gasoline sales, Venezuela could help mitigate the damage with exports. Venezuela could also serve as a base for transshipment of Russian arms sales to Iran, with the hope that Israel would not detect them until it is too late. Finally, Iran could farm out sensitive stages of its nuclear program to Venezuela, where it would hope to avoid the watchful eye of inspectors. Any of these scenarios could provoke the United States to abandon its deliberate passivity.

Chávez has already shown a penchant for mischief, particularly within Latin America. So far, he has meddled successfully in the electoral processes of smaller countries—Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Paraguay, El Salvador, Honduras—and much less successfully in larger nations—Mexico, Peru, and Colombia. His flops have permitted a certain tolerance for his triumphs. At the end of the day, who governs in Managua is no longer a matter of huge preoccupation in most foreign ministries.

But the larger countries are a different kettle of fish. Two, in particular, stand out as tempting targets for Venezuelan adventurism. Colombia is Chávez's ongoing obsession. He cannot bring this country into his orbit electorally, but he could conceivably try to move it into his column through other means—revolution, insurrection, pressure from across the border. Peru, the more likely candidate for his meddling, will hold elections in 2011 under highly adverse circumstances, with its (unjustly) unpopular ruling party and no viable centrist alternative to the Chavista, Ollanta Humala. In either case, successful Venezuelan involvement would in all likelihood trigger a U.S. response of one type or another. These countries are simply too large, with too many U.S. investments and a central role in the drug trade.

While the region has reason to cheer this turn in U.S. policy, it simply can't afford for the United States to disappear. On matters such as immigration, free trade, and the battle against corruption, almost nothing can be done without U.S. cooperation or leadership. Or take the steps toward drug decriminalization made by California, Nevada, and Oregon. These shifts in policy could be more important for the hemisphere than the 40-year-old "war on drugs" or the Mérida Initiative or Plan Colombia. The producer countries of the drug trade will not advance toward decriminalization unless the consumer country *par excellence* moves in that direction first.

Economic development in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America is hardly conceivable, let alone possible, without a significant U.S. contribution, both monetary and conceptual. Building up infrastructure, stabilizing currencies, and establishing effective and transparent antitrust institutions are tasks that countries cannot carry out alone, given their integration with the U.S. economy.

Many of the region's traditionally anti-interventionist nations—Mexico, Brazil, Argentina—are coming to understand the need to anchor Latin America's democracy in a strong, intrusive, and detailed legal framework, the same way that free-trade agreements, as well as World Bank and IMF programs, have solidified economic policies that are finally yielding results. The United States must be part of this framework, to coax these countries along and to bestow credibility upon whatever is built. Many of the institutions that enshrine this emerging consensus—the American Convention on Human Rights, the Inter-American Democratic Charter, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights—would be meaningless, like the League of Nations, if Washington were not a part of them.

These new structures are filled with potential. But, to deal with crises both ongoing and looming, they will need to devise answers to knotty questions: How will they address the subtle and innovative threats to electoral fairness, an impartial judiciary, and freedom of the press posed by Chávez's authoritarian drift? When does the legitimacy of a democratically elected president transform itself into the illegitimacy of undemocratic governance? When should free-trade privileges be suspended—when labor rights and environmental rule are threatened, or when democracy is interrupted?

Whatever policies emerge from these discussions would be meaningless without the United States. This is why the South American attempts at replacing the Organization of American States with a new organization that excludes the United States, Canada, and perhaps Mexico are futile at best, counterproductive at worst. The void left by U.S. retrenchment would be occupied by someone—and the alternatives are not attractive. Mexico is consumed by domestic tribulations, and Brazil is bound by an anti-interventionist diplomacy; only Caracas and Havana (the former with money, the latter with skill and experience) can fill the vacuum.

The end of the era of intervention should be hailed by the region. Washington's less intrusive presence will broaden the leeway certain governments have and force others to assume their responsibilities. But world events do not seem likely to permit an indefinite U.S. disengagement from the region, nor would that be desirable.

Washington has drifted into its current position with little forethought. But, to avoid the worst-case scenarios, it will need to actively manage its relations. The challenge presented by the Latin hard left must be confronted in a new fashion. Obama will need an actual doctrine—or, at least, coherent policy—to guide his decisions: a calculus that distinguishes between matters that are properly part of a country's domestic policy and those that entail violations of freely consented international agreements. By making this distinction, the United States could shed its history and get off the defensive, shifting the onus to Chávez. James Monroe's doctrine would officially be retired. A new era could truly begin. ◆

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ANTHONY RUSSO

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The Rise of Republican Nihilism

What happened to all those GOP ideas?

JONATHAN CHAIT

Does the Republican Party have any ideas? The query may have a familiar ring. Five years ago, the question of substance was demanded incessantly of the Democrats. Indeed, in one of those intellectual fads that periodically sweep through Washington, the political class became obsessed with the notion that conservatives had unambiguously won what everybody was calling "the war of ideas."

The notion was everywhere. The right gloated. ("Conservative thought," boasted right-wing foundation maven James Piereson, "has seized the initiative in the world of ideas.") Republicans scolded the opposition. (President Bush chastised Democrats in Congress: "[I]f they have no ideas or policies except obstruction, they should step aside and let others lead.") And Democrats internalized the accusation. ("It makes me realize," observed labor leader Andrew Stern in 2005, "how vibrant the Republicans are in creating twenty-first-century ideas, and how sad it is that we're defending sixty-year-old ideas.")

We don't need the benefit of hindsight to grasp how silly it was to claim that the Bush-era Republican Party had risen to power on the crest of policy ideas whose time had come, or that the Democratic Party lacked an agenda of its own. The taunts about Democrats' lacking ideas was less a serious analysis than an attempt to bully the party into cooperating with Bush's plan to gradually privatize Social Security.

In reality, both parties have plenty of ideas that they would like to implement if given the political power to do so. Republicans' policy ideas primarily involve cutting marginal tax rates and regulations. The question isn't whether the Republican Party has any ideas. The question is whether the party has any *relevant* ideas.

In the days following the 2008 election, some Republicans predicted that the party would retool itself in response to reality—not just political reality but the actuality of policy challenges. "Republicans," wrote conservative Ramesh Ponnuru in *Time*, "will have to devise an agenda that speaks to a country where more people feel the bite of payroll taxes than income taxes, where health-care costs eat up raises even in good times, where the length of the daily commute is a bigger irritant than are earmarks." Nothing like that rethinking has happened or will happen.

Whatever the merits of President Obama's agenda, it is clearly a response to objectively large problems facing the country. The administration has selected three main issues as the focus of its domestic agenda: the economic crisis, climate change, and health care reform. The issues themselves offer a stark contrast with Bush's 2005 crusade to reshape Social Security. While sold as a response to the program's long-term deficit, the privatization campaign was actually motivated by ideological opposition to Social Security's redistributive role. (Bush refused Democratic offers to negotiate a fix to the program's solvency without altering its social-insurance character.) By contrast, it is impossible to dismiss the problems Obama has chosen to address. In all three areas, the Republican Party has adopted a stance of total opposition, not merely because it disagrees with aspects of Obama's solutions, but because it cannot come to grips with the very nature of the problems of modern American politics.

Begin with the economic crisis. The root cause of the collapse, as we all know by now, is that financial firms have grown so large and interconnected that the risks they incur can bring down the rest of the economy, forcing the government to intervene. After some initial support, the Republican response has been to denounce the financial bailout, without making any case that failing to save the financial system would have prevented a far deeper disaster.

To some extent, Republicans are simply exploiting populist anger. But the deeper problem lies in the rigidity of conservative ideology. In the most simple and pure market model, a business must be allowed to fail in order for capitalism to function. Once the government begins propping up failed firms, we have embarked upon the road to serfdom and there is no turning back.

As a general principle, this is eminently sensible. Yet it cannot accommodate the reality of a financial industry that, left to its own devices, can bring the rest of the economy down with it. David Frum, the former Bush speechwriter turned conservative apostate, recently recounted his attempt to persuade a group of young conservatives that they had to bend their principles in the face of economic calamity. As Frum recalls it, one of the conservative interlocutors replied, "Maybe it was a good thing we weren't in power then—because our principles don't allow us to respond to a crisis like this."

To deal with the fallout from the financial collapse, Obama helped shepherd a stimulus package consisting of temporary spending and tax cuts. There is some debate among economists as to the effectiveness of fiscal stimulus, though economic forecasting firms have arrived at a consensus that the stimulus helped cushion the blow of the recession. But the rhetoric within the GOP is utterly disconnected from this academic and professional economic analysis. In the Republican view, the stimulus has either done nothing whatsoever to help the economy, or it has deepened the recession.

House Minority Whip Eric Cantor, appearing at a recent public forum, complained that the media were ignoring his party's economic ideas. OK, replied a reporter, what are those ideas? Cantor could only pivot to his political calculation. "The big idea is to get, to get, to produce an environment where we can have job creation again," he replied. "And see, that's where the Obama administration's agenda so clearly disadvantages the Democrats in this upcoming election in eleven months and advantages us." So the "idea" is to exploit public discontent over the economy.

Republicans do have an alternative—albeit one they understandably prefer not to discuss in any detail. Senator Jim DeMint introduced a GOP stimulus plan, authored by the Heritage Foundation, that consists of making the Bush tax cuts permanent and adding onto them a series of permanent tax breaks heavily tilted toward corporations and high-income earners. It would cost more than $3 trillion—more than triple the cost of Obama's stimulus—over the next decade, after which point its costs would continue to accrue (whereas the stimulus will

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end after a few years). This is some sort of ideological brain-stem reflex, not the product of any analysis of the state of the U.S. economy.

One observer dismissed DeMint's plan thusly: "It is not innovative or particularly clever. In fact, it's only eleven pages." Oddly enough, this observer was DeMint himself, talking up his proposal in a speech at the Heritage Foundation. On the contemporary right, it is a mark of intellectual integrity that even a massive economic cataclysm would not prompt any revising of one's economic prescription. And, while DeMint speaks from the fringe of the party, his beliefs are by no means confined to it: 90 percent of the current Senate GOP caucus voted for his plan.

On climate change, the Republican response has been equally instructive. The largest and most strident bloc of Republican opinion remains deeply skeptical of mainstream climate science. (I don't have the space here to defend the legitimacy of the overwhelming majority opinion among climate scientists. Suffice it to say that if you believe most scientists have fabricated evidence that carbon emissions contribute to rising global temperatures, you won't find these five paragraphs persuasive.) Those Republican legislators who have supported any action on climate change have rallied around a plan to construct nuclear reactors, which, in addition to costing $600 billion and taking a decade to have any effect, would reduce carbon emissions by a mere 12 percent. The one Republican senator who has urged a comprehensive solution, Lindsey Graham, has found himself under severe attack from home-state Republicans and threatened by a primary challenger.

Granted, some of the GOP's reticence stems from its alliance with energy interests—a failing that numerous Democrats share. Yet the Republican opposition to limiting carbon-dioxide emissions also closely reflects currents of right-wing thought.

A decade ago, nearly all conservatives rejected the connection between carbon emissions and climate change. Though many still do, a growing minority of right-wingers now accepts the mainstream scientific position. However, rather than proceed from that premise to some program of reduced emissions, they have feverishly devised a series of rationales for unlimited carbon use. Some have embraced fantastical geoengineering schemes—massive machines, for example, that would suck carbon out of the sky—with the rabid certainty of a science-fiction nut. Others insist that limiting U.S. emissions will do nothing to help force developing nations to do the same. Still other conservatives argue that the future world will be richer and thus able to cope with whatever calamities a hotter planet will bring.

The telling thing here is not that these arguments are provably wrong, though they are highly speculative. It's that those conservatives who have accepted climate-change science immediately jumped to some other reason to oppose government action. These reasons are, in theory, separate logical propositions: The feasibility of creating giant machines to suck carbon out of the sky has nothing to do with the diplomatic question of whether U.S. climate action could influence China to follow suit.

Yet virtually no conservative intellectuals seem to settle, even temporarily, on the view that climate change is real *and* that government regulation is therefore appropriate. They cling to climate-science skepticism like a life preserver, and then, when they can't hold on any more, they grasp immediately for a different rationale. If government intervention appears to be the answer, they must change the question.

Finally, there is health care. As on climate change, Republicans long denied that this issue constituted a problem at all. The party line held that the United States has the best health care in the world. (In reality, despite spending vastly more money per person than any other country, the United States ranks highest among 19 advanced countries in deaths by diseases amenable to medical treatment, not to mention the ongoing disaster of the uninsured.) Today, public dissatisfaction with the health care system has forced the GOP to concede, at least rhetorically, that the system is broken. The GOP response? A lot of Republican and conservative reform plans that mostly reflect the right's embrace of the failed market system that created the health care disaster.

For numerous well-documented reasons, the market for health care does not work like the market for normal goods. The single largest problem is that tens of millions of people need more health care than they can afford, either because they're too poor, or because they're unhealthy and require inordinately expensive care, or both. The only way to solve this problem is to somehow make the richer and healthier people help pay for the care of the poorer and sicker.

The simplest, and arguably best, solution would be for the government to assume the role of paying for everybody's health insurance. Since such a plan couldn't pass Congress, Democrats have settled on a plan to subsidize health insurance for the poor and sick and to protect them from discrimination in the insurance marketplace. To make sure that the system functions effectively, they would also require everybody to get health insurance; that way, healthy people would pay into the system and subsidize the sick.

The Republican plans reject these approaches. Either they lack meaningful regulations on discriminating against the sick, or they lack a mandate to bring the healthy into the system; and none provides anything like the necessary funds to make their plans work. Far worse, the Republican plans tear away at the protections that do exist for people with high medical costs. Currently, most people get insurance through their jobs, an arrangement that pools high risks with low risks: Your 25-year-old clerk who plays shortstop for the office softball team pays the same premiums as the asthmatic 57-year-old accountant. The GOP plans usually give people individual tax credits that encourage them to drop out of employer health care and buy it on their own. That's great for the 25-year-old, but the accountant will suddenly be in trouble.

The Republicans' favorite reform is to let people buy insurance from any state they want. Currently, states require insurance plans to offer certain basic services—psychiatric benefits, maternity care, and so on. That creates another subsidy from the healthy to the sick—healthy people have to buy insurance that pays for all kinds of care they probably won't need, keeping down the cost for people who do need it. If you let people buy out-of-state insurance, states will lure insurance companies by offering lax requirements, and the healthy will follow. That would allow all the healthy, inexpensive customers to have cheap plans with

On the right, it is a mark of intellectual integrity that even a massive economic cataclysm would not prompt any revising of one's economic prescription.

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other inexpensive, healthy people, while sick, expensive customers would get stuck in expensive insurance plans with other sick, expensive customers.

Almost nobody takes these plans seriously as legislative proposals. They are a response to the cross-pressures of the general public's demand that the party appear to have a positive vision on health care and the base's demand of fealty to the ideals of the free market. So the House Republican plan would require states to establish plans to cover people with preexisting conditions, but it makes no suggestion for where the funding for such plans would come from. Likewise, the "Health Care Freedom Act," sponsored by DeMint, is funded by repealing the financial bailout and demanding a prompt repayment. If you're wondering what the consequences of immediately repealing the bailout might be, or where this plan would find its financing after the bailout funds ran out, you're missing the point of the exercise. The main role of these plans is to serve as a prop for the disingenuous party talking point that Congress should defeat Obama's plan and "start over" with "real reform."

The quintessential moment in the health care debate came when Senator Lamar Alexander objected to Democratic attempts to weed out Medicare waste: "If you're going to find some savings in waste, fraud, and abuse in Grandma's Medicare," he proclaimed, "spend it on Grandma." Consider this as an ethical proposition: Alexander is saying that every dollar of Medicare is sacrosanct, that even those dollars he concedes provide zero public benefit must stay in the program. We live in a country where the occasional appearance of a roving charitable medical clinic will prompt thousands of desperate people to line up in parking lots for hours on end, to help mitigate their suffering. And yet, Republicans will not countenance the shift of even indisputably wasted resources to help them.

Partisan self-interest—an accurate belief that Obama's legislative failure offers Republicans the most likely road back to power—surely accounts for some of the party's obstinacy. But at least as powerful is the deepening hold on the GOP of anti-government ideology.

Several years ago, I wrote in these pages that the fundamental difference between economic conservatism and economic liberalism is that the former is driven by abstract philosophical beliefs in a way that the latter is not. Conservatives believe that small-government policies maximize human welfare. But they also believe that they increase human freedom. Liberals, by contrast, believe in government intervention *only* to the extent that it increases human welfare.

If liberals could be persuaded that tax cuts would actually increase living standards for all Americans, they would embrace them. (This is why nearly all liberals believe that some level of tax rate, be it 50 or 70 or 90 percent, becomes counterproductive.) If conservatives came to believe that tax cuts failed to increase economic growth, most would still support them anyway, because they enhance freedom. As Milton Friedman once put it, "[E]conomic freedom is an end in itself."

For this reason, liberals tend to do a better job at devising policies that maximize human welfare. They do not do a perfect job, nor is there always a singular definition of "human welfare"—some of

Women's Suffrage and Other Visions of Right-Wing Apocalypse

Conservatives have lined up in near-unanimous opposition to any progressive legislation introduced during President Obama's first year in office. Whether they've been railing against health care reform, a climate bill, or financial regulation, their ire has stemmed less from legislative specifics than from a generalized prophecy of doom: Obama's proposals will move the country toward socialism, bankrupt entire industries and small businesses, and deny Americans their basic freedoms. These arguments, however, aren't new. Conservatives—not just Republicans, but various politicians and groups who've resisted major social changes—recycled them throughout the twentieth century. They used them to oppose numerous progressive measures that Americans now take for granted, from women's suffrage to child-labor laws to Medicare. Here we've collected a few choice predictions about disaster that never came. Conservatives today might prefer they be forgotten.

"It may be impracticable that our distinctively American experiment of individual freedom should go on."
—Senator David Hill (D-NY), in 1894, bemoaning the creation of a federal income tax

"Woman suffrage would give to the wives and daughters of the poor a new opportunity to gratify their envy and mistrust of the rich. Meantime these new voters would become either the purchased or cajoled victims of plausible political manipulators, or the intimidated and helpless voting vassals of imperious employers."
—Former President Grover Cleveland, in 1905, on why women shouldn't be able to vote

"[T]he child will become a very dominant factor in the household and might refuse perhaps to do chores before six a.m. or after seven p.m. or to perform any labor."
—Senator Weldon Heyburn (R-ID), in 1908, on why child labor should remain unregulated

"I fear it may end the progress of a great country and bring its people to the level of the average European. It will furnish delicious food and add great strength to the political demagogue. It will assist in driving worthy and courageous men from public life. It will discourage and defeat the American trait of thrift. It will go a long way toward destroying American initiative and courage."
—Senator Daniel O. Hastings (R-DE), in 1935, listing the evils of Social Security

"[I]t would make it practically impossible for any publisher in the United States to accept any food, drug, or cosmetic advertising without facing squarely into the doors of a jail."
—Federal Trade Commission Chair Ewin L. Davis, in 1935, on the dangers of empowering the Food and Drug Administration to regulate the food, drug, and cosmetic industries

"I do not think we can take the Chinese with their habits and mentalities in this year and time into our great American

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the thorniest dilemmas of public policy involve trade-offs over *whose* welfare to maximize. Still, you're going to fare better at maximizing human welfare if that is your sole goal, rather than one of two oft-competing goals.

Conservatism can succeed at maximizing human welfare when faced with government failure or some other circumstance that naturally lends itself to ideologically congenial tools, like inflation in the 1970s. But conservatism is plagued by blindness in the face of even textbook cases of market failure.

In the graphic below, some of The New Republic's staff have compiled a brief history of conservative opposition to social reform over the last century. It puts on display conservatism's miserable record of predicting the outcome of various liberal reforms, in the social and political as well as economic spheres.

One of those items is a diatribe against the passage of Medicare delivered by Ronald Reagan in 1961. Earlier this year, *National Review Online* editor-at-large Jonah Goldberg called Reagan's address "still fresh today." This is a strange description for even as committed a right-winger as Goldberg. In his speech, Reagan predicted that Medicare would lead to the government dictating how doctors might practice and where they'd live, and that, if it came into law, "[Y]ou and I are going to spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it once was like in America when men were free."

Almost certainly, Goldberg did not mean to praise this as a prescient warning of how Medicare would unfold. The title he chose, "The Gipper on Socialized Medicine," suggests that he viewed the speech as a prescient warning about the *next* step in health care reform. But this is how conservatism tends to operate: In the right-wing mind, the world we live in at any given moment can be described as the free market, the American way of life, perhaps not a perfect world but a cherished and fundamentally free one. The *next* advance of liberalism will always bring socialism, tyranny, a crushing burden on industry, and other horrors. The previous liberal advances that they or their predecessors greeted with such hysteria are eventually incorporated into the landscape of the free American way of life.

For additional political coverage by Jonathan Chait and other TNR editors, visit **THE PLANK** *at www.tnr.com*

Everything that the 1960s right said about Medicare, the contemporary right no longer believes, while fervently believing it will all hold true of health care reform. Similarly, the hysteria of the 1970s right about clean-air regulation no longer plagues the contemporary right, but it grips conservatives when it comes to greenhouse-gas regulation. (Charles Krauthammer: Cap-and-trade "will destroy what's left of the industrial Midwest.") And so it goes.

Rush Limbaugh, speaking at this year's Conservative Political Action Conference, boasted, "Conservatism is what it is and it is forever. It's not something you can bend and shape and flake and form." This is true of the general principles, but utterly false of the particulars. The specifics of the reform they oppose have been in constant flux for a century—from child-labor laws to integration to health care reform. The tone of apocalyptic hysteria at the prospect of reform remains constant. ◆

melting pot and in ten years or a hundred years bring them up to our standards of civilization."

—Representative Compton I. White (D-ID), in 1943, on why we shouldn't allow Chinese nationals to immigrate or become U.S. citizens

"[The Act represents] a step in the direction of Communism, bolshevism, fascism, and Nazism."

—The National Association of Manufacturers, in 1938, condemning a national minimum wage and guaranteed overtime pay

"It is destroying the amicable relations between the white and Negro races that have been created through 90 years of patient effort by the good people of both races. It has planted hatred and suspicion where there has been heretofore friendship and understanding."

—Senator Strom Thurmond (D-SC), Senator Richard Russell (D-GA), and other Southern legislators, in 1956, describing the perils of integrating public schools

"It is socialism. It moves the country in a direction which is not good for anyone, whether they be young or old. It charts a course from which there will be no turning back."

—Senator Carl Curtis (R-NE), in 1965, opposing Medicare

"[T]his bill could prevent continued production of automobiles . . . [and] is a threat to the entire American economy and to every person in America."

—Lee Iacocca, executive vice president of Ford Motor Company, in 1970, on why the government shouldn't regulate airborne contaminants that are hazardous to human health

"The effects include serious long-term losses in domestic output and employment, heavy cost burdens on manufacturing industries, and a resultant gradual contraction of the entire industrial base. The irony of this bleak scenario is that these economic hardships are borne with no real assurance they would be balanced by a cleaner, healthier environment."

—The National Association of Manufacturers, in 1987, on the perils of an emissions-reduction program to combat acid rain

"The doctor begins to lose freedoms; it's like telling a lie, and one leads to another. First you decide that the doctor can have so many patients. They are equally divided among the various doctors by the government. But then the doctors aren't equally divided geographically, so a doctor decides he wants to practice in one town and the government has to say to him you can't live in that town, they already have enough doctors. You have to go someplace else. And from here it is only a short step to dictating where he will go."

—Ronald Reagan, in 1961, arguing against the creation of Medicare

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Compiled by Benjamin Bernstein, Benjamin Birnbaum, Lydia DePillis, Noah Kristula-Green, Amanda Silverman, Julie Sobel, and Jesse Zwick.

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

ROUGH ROUTES

An extraordinary Iraq war film takes place at home—at homes—and moves through wartime experience known generally yet generally disregarded. *The Messenger* is about the Army's Casualty Notification office. When a soldier is killed, two uniformed soldiers, usually decorated veterans, are sent to the soldier's home to notify the next of kin personally. (A letter from the secretary of the Army soon follows.) Notification personnel are bound by strict rules of behavior—"Do Not Touch the N.O.K." is one of them—but no rules can protect the messengers from deep effect on themselves.

Good films, we all know by now, begin with good screenplays. Even if that adage is not invariably true, it is certainly the case here. *The Messenger* was written by Oren Moverman and Alessandro Camon, and it vibrates throughout with dialogue so taut and incisive that it not only fits what is happening, it is itself gratifying. The writers have, among other glints, utilized what are apparently clichés of army talk in such a way that they affirm army life as a universe. "Bullets fly, and soldiers die." The captain who says this has presumably heard it many times, and his very familiarity with it makes it fitting rather than stale.

The precise dialogue is all the more remarkable because Moverman, who also directed, was born in Israel, where he served four years as an infantryman in the Israel Defense Forces. His ear is now tuned to America: he has written previous scripts in this country. But out of experience, he seems here to be relying on a freemasonry among soldiers of most countries that, friendly with one another or not, enables them to understand spoken and unspoken things about one another.

Staff Sergeant Will Montgomery, recently wounded in Iraq and decorated, is relieved from active duty and assigned to work with Captain Tony Stone on a notification team. Stone, a veteran long past disillusion, is friendly-stiff with Montgomery, and the sergeant, expecting nothing in particular, obeys orders, period. Together they make six visits of notification during the film. The first N.O.K., a father, becomes furious at them, almost violent. Another father simply becomes ill on the spot.

THE MESSENGER
Oscilloscope

BEFORE TOMORROW
Alliance Films

But *The Messenger* could not merely be a chronicle of those visits, and not just because they are terrible. Those visits are part—huge but only a part—of the team's lives. Between times we learn more about Stone and Montgomery, in the past and the present. Stone, a former drunk, says that he has been married three times, twice to the same woman. We have seen at the very start something of Montgomery's private life, a visit to his apartment by an ex-girlfriend who is now affianced elsewhere. We see him moving, at first a bit awkwardly, into his new duty. The two men drink and eat and get to know each other. We see their professional experience knitting them. At one point, they more or less provoke a fistfight with three men just because, we sense, they want to vent their own stopped-up feelings. Later on, when the two men have been seasoned together by their notification visits as if they had been in battle together, they turn up slightly soused, and very out of dress, at the engagement party of Montgomery's earlier girl. By this time, we can believe that their disarray represents inner disorder.

The script makes few concessions to movieness. One element might be the result of a story conference call for a non-grim element, but the writing and the performances of this material are so touching that it does not intrude. Montgomery becomes fond of a young woman who is now, as he and Stone have told her, a widow. She, reticent and a touch embarrassed, subsequently responds to the sergeant as a man. The attraction between them takes us because she suggests subtly that, in an intricate sense, he has been to her an emissary for her husband, a vicar. And he, aware of both the inappropriateness and the truth of his feeling, is ready for her.

Thus scenes that might have seemed sheer audience compensation in other hands are germane with Moverman. He has taste and invention and discretion. The blunt moments of death notification are done with variety but no sense of straining for variety. The scenes between the two soldiers off-duty never mention the notification job—except for one blunder that Montgomery makes—yet they are steeped in the experience. The scenes between the woman and the sergeant have almost no physical contact yet are full of feeling. The very last scene, which is between these two, is capped with a graceful elision.

Ben Foster, who plays Montgomery, is not an immediately compelling actor, but Moverman has mined all that Foster has to give, which is plenty. With Woody Harrelson, who is Stone, Moverman may have had the opposite job—keeping him down. Harrelson is one of the unappreci-

ANTHONY RUSSO

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ated film forces of our time. (His performance in *Natural Born Killers* still sears in memory.) Actors of his stripe and experience sometimes lean on their power a bit heavily; but here Harrelson simply becomes a hard-bitten officer who, in the midst of cozy domestic settings, goes daily (as he says) to hell and back. Samantha Morton, who plays the widow, understands her and fulfills her.

But it is Moverman who gives the film its ultimate distinction. First, he has asked his cinematographer, Bobby Bukowski, to keep shot after shot warmly lighted but enclosed in dark. Excepting the exteriors, almost all the action, casual though it may sometimes be, takes place in the embrace of shadow. Moverman has also perceived this film as more than its immediate story. Its ultimate sense is deeper. Stone and Montgomery go stoically through daily torment as soldierly duty. But Moverman conveys that their lives are the tiniest dot in a vast complex of forces that can take human beings where they had no wish or intent to go and gives them no choice: existence itself as a form of servitude. The texture of the whole film and this implicit theme make Moverman's debut very welcome.

Space, terrestrial space, is almost a character in some films. At least it colors character. The cowhand in Monument Valley and the shepherd on the Mongolian plain seem somehow enlarged, dramatized, by their very habitat. In a new film set in the Arctic, when a fur-wrapped old Inuit woman leans over her reclining fur-wrapped grandson in their tent and murmurs endearments to him, her feelings seem grander than ordinary, prototypical, because of the immense snowy waste in the midst of which these two are huddled.

Before Tomorrow is the third of a trilogy about the Inuits of which *The Fast Runner*, a heroic myth, was the first. (I missed the second.) This new one is set in 1840 or so (hence the title), when the white man is approaching—we hear about him—but has not yet really arrived. A central figure in the making of the whole trilogy is a woman named Madeline Invalu, who co-directed with Marie-Hélène Cousineau, helped to derive the script from a novel by Jørn Riel, and plays the grandmother. Her own grandson is in that role. Invalu, who is nearly too remarkable for compliments, is a prime member of a group of women intent on fixing Inuit tradition and character in film form.

After this ninety-three-minute film is finished, one astonishment is that, though it has been utterly gripping, the story was less than minimal. An Inuit family goes fishing for a winter's supply. Father and mother must move on: they leave the grandmother, the ten-year-old boy, and another old woman on an island in charge of drying the fish. The other old woman subsequently dies, peacefully. Much of the film deals with the boy's learning some essentials of Inuit life—harpooning seals, spearing fish, and so on—to the admiration of his grandmother. The screenplay raises a few questions: a massacre somewhere (presumably by whites) is glimpsed briefly and is unexplained; two puppies suddenly appear on the island. But the very simplicity of the story holds us, makes us almost ashamed to raise questions, as if we were cross-examining an ancient myth.

The fascination is increased by the very fact that this is an enacted film. The people are so at ease that we are bewitched by the knowledge that this is not a documentary. I remember wondering from time to time in Bergman's *Virgin Spring* how in the world they got a camera back then. *Before Tomorrow* is not Bergman, and not only because of lesser acting, but the same naïveté recurs, a simpleminded tribute to the picture's verity.

Many of these people have appeared in previous Inuit films, but most of them, we are told, keep on with their hunting and fishing. Perhaps what we are seeing is an Inuit version of neo-realism, in which non-actors, sympathetic and committed, move into films from time to time in order to preserve their world. Without anything that could seriously be called talent, their authenticity, the dailiness of what they do, is the fabric of the work.

Fittingly, though, a documentary does come to mind. The first time I saw *Nanook of the North*, I wondered why no one ever thought of sending aid to these people who were struggling against hunger and cold in icy wastes. That feeling recurs, with a smile, whenever I see *Nanook* again, as I remember that these people are self-sufficient. They know their lives. They are not in special distress: this is how they live, and they have pride in their survival. *Before Tomorrow* elicits the same sense of tradition and pride.

The film ends—in fact it's the trilogy that is ending—with a group shot of Inuit people. The story of grandma and grandson is finished: we are now back among Inuits, who are watching the sea, eating, talking, practicing with bow and arrow, playing soccer, *being*. How undistressed they look. ◆

Jennifer Homans on Dance
THE ART OF WORK

Frederick Wiseman's new film about the Paris Opera Ballet begins with a building. In a series of staccato shots that follow one after another like a silent slide show, we move from an overview of Paris into the streets of the city until we find ourselves squarely in front of the Palais Garnier, the ornate nineteenth-century theater where the company performs. The next image is a shock. From this light-filled, outdoor Parisian world we suddenly find ourselves in a dark underground tunnel: we are in the catacombs and the bowels of the theater. The "slides" continue, still in silence: shots of dimly lit backstage areas with ancient-looking pulleys, cranks, pillars, and ropes neatly wound on the floor as if on an old ship's deck. The weight and the age of the theater's physical plant is palpable. Then we see a hallway, hear music, and Wiseman cuts to a rehearsal studio where dancers are taking class.

LA DANSE: LE BALLET DE L'OPÉRA DE PARIS
Frederick Wiseman

What follows is an engrossing and unconventional documentary essay on the art of dance. Wiseman gives us no obvious plot, no narrator, and no music other than that which goes with the dances. We move, ghost-like, around the theater: from studio to stage to costume shop, canteen, and administrative offices—always passing through the old hallways and winding staircases that join them. Ballet, he makes us feel, is a place and an institution as much as it is an art. Occasionally we re-emerge onto the streets, bleary-eyed, to glimpse the theater lobby or to travel to the Bastille Opera House, the company's second (and garishly modern) home, but the film's heart lies inside the Palais Garnier. We are there for nearly three hours, enclosed in the heavy stone walls of a tradition.

La Danse is the only film I know that successfully conveys what it feels like, physically, to be a dancer—to get inside

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a step or a phrase and to make it work on your own body—but also to live, as dancers do, absorbed in the repetitive, ritualized, and seemingly timeless practices of their art. None of this is monkish or self-sacrificing, as it is often portrayed. It is simply what dancers do: it is their work. (When I was myself a dancer I was always surprised when people marveled at the discipline of dancers: that, it seemed to me, was utterly unremarkable—a given.) Wiseman studiously avoids backstage gossip and competitive tensions, and says nothing about injuries, nerves, divas, casting sheets. He never indulges high-drama tantrums or celebrity worship: he does not even give us the names or the ranks of the dancers, nor does he identify Brigitte Lefèvre, the Paris Opera's formidable director of dance. We do not know exactly who these people are, we only see the work they are doing.

Wiseman's past films signal his approach. Many of his films, beginning with *Titicut Follies* in 1967, which documented life in a prison for the criminally insane, have focused on difficult social issues and the institutions that address (and perpetuate) them: films such as *Welfare*, *Public Housing*, *Basic Training*. Wiseman has said that he is interested in work and what constitutes it. In 1995 he turned to—of all things—dance, and made *Ballet* about the American Ballet Theater, a close (and very long) study of the work of a ballet company. Yet the film—like the American tradition that it documented—had a freewheeling and relaxed rhythm that made it feel diffuse; it lacked the intensity of the art that it described. *La Danse*, by contrast, goes straight to the source: the Paris Opera is where ballet formally began. Founded by Louis XIV in 1669, it is a centralized national institution with an unbroken tradition.

It is not that Wiseman gives us a history. He doesn't have to do so; it is all there in the art. The dancers may have sleek twenty-first-century bodies, but they inhabit an archaic society based on hierarchy and patronage: this is perhaps the only surviving court art in our hypermodern age. It requires, as Molière once noted of Louis XIV's theatrical ventures, "an army" of artisans—dressers, costume designers, seamstresses, makeup artists, painters, lighting technicians, cooks, ballet masters. Costumes are still sewn by hand, sequin by sequin, and toe shoes (dozens of them) are carefully sprayed, one by one, with the appropriate dye and hung to dry. Fabrics are dipped and stirred in great vats of color; lighting engineers painstakingly set each cue; painters plaster and re-paint the timeworn walls; and all the while dancers labor at their craft. The food in the canteen—presented to us fully plated in still-life close-up shots—looks as if it had been served that way for centuries.

Life inside this theater is self-sufficient and all-consuming. The dancers work, eat, dress, and perform in this still very nineteenth-century world. None of this is romanticized by Wiseman. Indeed, in one striking scene toward the end of the film he shows us a cleaner, alone, tidying the plush red-velvet and gold-gilt house after a performance. He is black—one of the only black people we have seen (except the painters)—and a reminder of the France outside the theater. We are made to wonder if "apart" is not also "cut off."

La Danse pays meticulous attention to the details of the art. Thus we watch a dancer struggle to master a single step (we are not told that she is an *étoile*, a "star" at the pinnacle of the Paris Opera hierarchy). She goes after it over and over again, with the ballet master and her partner coaching her, but she cannot seem to get it. Her body just can't feel it. Finally her partner muses that "she imagines an arabesque where there is none." Immediately we understand: she has to change her *physical* mind, shift her body's thinking, in order to internalize the step. Figuring out how to do this takes some time, and we are made to feel the consuming repetition and the long hours that go into even the tiniest refinements in a dance. Wiseman offsets this concentrated technical analysis with images of languid stretching, and we sense the way in which dancers are always in their bodies, always aware and feeling them, even when they are not controlling them: the stretching is like the body daydreaming or doodling. At one point we get an extended shot of dancers' feet—only the feet—which reminded me of the games that dancers like to play, such as identifying a colleague exclusively by the distinctive shape of her instep.

If Wiseman takes us inside the physicality of ballet, he also evokes its wispy ethereality. All theaters are haunted—with memories, past performances, yesterday's dancers. Thus instead of walking his camera (and us) smoothly through the theater, Wiseman cuts from a dancer in a class to an empty room to a patch of light to a staircase; or from a staircase to a hallway to a studio. This might sound a bit arty, but it is not at all: the staccato rhythm and the visual disjuncture make us feel that we are appearing suddenly—invisibly—around the theater and in the dancers' midst. (How did we get from the staircase to the hallway?) It is like a child's trick: we see, but we are not seen.

In an art form with no standardized notation—no scores or scripts—the way that ballets are passed on from one generation to the next is vital, and Wiseman is not afraid to show us the process in all of its technical detail. Thus two older coaches working with a younger dancer disagree at some length over whether a dancer's heels should drop fully to the floor when she bends her knees before a jump (more power), or whether they should remain raised a fraction of an inch from the floor (more agility and speed). If this sounds like hairsplitting—or shoptalk—it is not. Wiseman has chosen carefully. The "heels raised" approach was first introduced by Balanchine, and denotes a modernist orientation, whereas "heels down" points to a more traditional nineteenth-century manner. It is a debate that has been re-enacted in dance studios for decades. The coaches know this. They carry out the argument with consummate ease, each knowing exactly what the other will say but saying it nonetheless, because it still matters: what the younger dancers decide is one of many details that shape the future of the art.

The dancers in *La Danse* are like dancers everywhere: verbally reticent, often painfully so, but possessed of a striking physical confidence and ease. The company's youngest dancers in particular appear childlike and timid. They do not talk much, and when they do they are self-effacing. No one thinks this odd, and in ballet it is not: deference is implicit in the art. Watching them, however, we realize that it is they, and not their coaches or an older generation, who stand for tradition and conservatism. These young people do not question their superiors or the tradition that is being bequeathed to them. On the contrary: in one of the film's most striking moments, we observe an exasperated Brigitte Lefèvre urging her staff to push young dancers to experiment with new styles and techniques—to be more radical. Partly this is Lefèvre, who reached her prime in the 1960s and was an unusually bold and innovative artist, but it is also a general point. Young dancers everywhere want to dance the toughest, most technically demanding virtuosic roles. For this reason, the challenges of contemporary works, which often move against the classical grain, are less appealing. It is ballet's youth that now anchors it in the past.

What about the choreography? Wiseman shows the tremendous range de-

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manded of dancers today: from the raw athleticism of the British choreographer Wayne McGregor to the ornate lyricism and carnivalesque spectacle of *The Nutcracker* or *Paquita*. We get extended excerpts of these dances, mostly shot (I think) from the first wing. But these are not like the excerpts in other documentaries or films. They are not snippets or reminders, but improvements: many of the dances that Wiseman shows us—and this is especially true for the more modern works—are better on film, certainly on this film, than they are live.

The reason is that Wiseman gives them a context and a history that they do not themselves possess. Consider *Le Songe de Médée*, choreographed by Angelin Preljocaj. We watch a dancer rehearsing the role, crawling forward and pulling her body heavily along the floor behind her (we don't know this is from *Medée* until later). At another point in the film we see a dancer discussing the role (we still don't know which) with a ballet master who reassures her that the performance will carry her, that she will find the role once the music, the costumes, and the spattered blood are real on stage. The dance, he says, has its own internal momentum and will build, step by step. Then we see the performance up close from the wings: the rehearsals rush to mind and "synch" with the dance, adding layers and depth. We are left with the astonishing feeling that Wiseman has re-assembled all the elements and thereby re-choreographed the dance, and also strengthened it by inserting it into a tradition and giving us visual images—and memories—that live performance precludes.

Wiseman is not the only one using film to try to make ballet today better than it is. Christopher Wheeldon, copying Britain's Ballet Boyz, has taken to prefacing performances with rehearsal footage and quaint scenes from the lives of dancers. But that is very different: Wheeldon's clips do little to bring us closer to the dance. They are distractions that pull our attention away from the ballet and towards the personality of the dancer—more solipsism than illumination. Wiseman does the opposite. By cutting from unidentified rehearsals with unidentified dancers to an unidentified performance, he focuses our attention purely on the dances themselves. There is no clutter of personality; just the dancer and the dance. The result is a film that allows us to know ballet and dancers more intimately than we may ever have known them, because we know the work they do.

Wiseman has called *La Danse* a "love letter" to ballet, and so it is. But it is also more. It is the film that ballet modernists have been waiting for: detached, controlled, at moments ironic. Wiseman does not shy away from artifice. Lest we be fooled, he distilled *La Danse* from some 130 hours of film shot over twelve weeks, and spent many months editing, crafting—choreographing—its sequences and montage. Nor does he mistake artifice for ornament, seeing it instead as a tool for getting to the truth—and for creating, as he has described his work, "reality fictions." These "fictions" have nothing to do with the romanticized or melodramatic ballet of popular imagining; they are simply ballet the way it is now, for dancers. But—and this is the point—Wiseman's single-minded focus on the craft and the inner workings of dance does not in any way trivialize or diminish the art. Ballet is all the more elevated and noble because of it. George Balanchine, to whom I imagine this film owes a debt, liked to say to his dancers of audiences, "they look but they do not see, so we must show them." Now Wiseman has shown them, too. ◆

Adam Thirlwell
THE ANIMATOR

CHARLES DICKENS
By Michael Slater
(Yale University Press, 696 pp., $35)

I.

For a long time, everyone has known that Paris was the capital of the nineteenth century, the city where the modern was invented: the society of the spectacular. But everyone was wrong. The capital of the nineteenth century was London. Think about it. Walter Benjamin's symbol of the Parisian modern was the arcade. The arcade! In London—according to the social campaigner Henry Mayhew, there were 300,000 dustbins, 300,000 cesspools, and three million chimneys. It was there that the truly modern was invented: industrial, overpopulated dirt. Its symbol was the slum. London was managed by a majority of minority trades, all in the business of garbage: bone-pickers, rag-gatherers, pure-finders, dredgermen, toshers. And London's greatest describer, who converted the ghostly industrial city into a new world of words, was a novelist who could taxonomically and poetically enumerate, say, the varieties of polluted fog: "Even in the surrounding country it was a foggy day, but there the fog was grey, whereas in London it was, at about the boundary line, dark yellow, and a little within it brown, and then browner, and then browner, until at the heart of the City—which call Saint Mary Axe—it was rusty-black."

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And yet, in public, this same writer could also put on an act like this:

> Believe me, ladies and gentlemen, that to the earnestness of my aim and desire to do right by my readers, and to leave our imaginative and popular literature more closely associated than I found it at once with the private homes and public rights of the English people, I shall ever be faithful,—to my death—in the principles which have won your approval. [Loud applause.]

Charles Dickens gave this sincere speech in Sheffield, the city of steel factories, in December 1855, on being presented by the mayor with a service of cutlery. It is unbelievable, perhaps, but it is true: that, too, is the voice of the most avant-garde European novelist of the nineteenth century.

Of all his impersonations, Dickens's greatest was his fluent mimicry of what the bourgeois public imagined that a novelist should be—through prefaces to his novels, which offered doctored accounts of their geneses as serial sketches in magazines; through his efforts on behalf of the Guild of Literature and Art, or his work with the Royal Literary Fund; through his collected editions (he supervised the following editions: the Charles Dickens, the Cheap, the Library, the Diamond, the People's, and the Hachette). He had a mania for canonization, for the public paraphernalia of authorship.

And this extended, most importantly, to his biography. Dickens died in June 1870. Seventeen months later, in November 1871, the first *Life* of Dickens was published by his friend John Forster—an eminent man of letters, the biographer

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of Goldsmith, Swift, and Landor—who had been appointed Dickens's biographer by Dickens himself. Dickens gave Forster autobiographical fragments, manuscripts, letters—which were all to be kept secret until the posthumous biography. On its publication, it revealed how autobiographical much of his writing had been—"watered," as one critic wrote, "with tears of self-compassion." The pain in Dickens, it turned out, was less a moral philosophy than a natural identification with the marginalized, the defenseless, the lost. And yet such autobiographical pain did nothing to change the essential idea of Dickens as a moralist, and of his novels as didactic agents of social comment.

But the era of psychology, and of social reform, were not alive to the energy in Dickens's art. His real greatness, I think, lay elsewhere: in his savage, magical style. With the appearance of Michael Slater's extraordinary biography, which exuberantly tracks the mercurial energy of Dickens's publication history—as well as his editing and his public readings—it is possible to be accurate to Dickens's wild originality, the career of his career.

The premise of this new biography is very simple, and wholly admirable. "Mindful of Dickens's words in his will about resting his claims to the remembrance of his country upon his published work," Slater declares, "I have focused primarily upon his career as a writer and professional author." The salacious reader will find the occasional brothel, the passing prostitute. But Nelly Ternan, the actress implicated in Dickens's separation from his wife around 1857 or 1858, is only a background figure: partly because Slater scrupulously refuses to speculate on unavailable evidence, but also because of his emphasis on that adjective "professional." The furious energy of Dickens's production in this biography is astonishing. As well as his novels, Slater gorgeously includes also "the context of the truly prodigious amount of *other* writing that he was constantly producing alongside the serial writing of those books"—the "short stories, sketches, topical journalism, essays, travel writing and writings for children, polemical pieces in verse as well as prose."

This is a biography of a writer as writer. It is therefore quite unique. "Overfamiliar metaphor," writes Kundera in *The Art of the Novel*: "The novelist destroys the house of his life and uses its stones to build the house of his novel. A novelist's biographers thus undo what a novelist has done, and redo what he undid." This is not true of Slater. "All their labor cannot illuminate either the value or the meaning of a novel," adds Kundera. I have always agreed with him; but this great book allows one to imagine a more delicate biographical form—a heuristic instrument for the analysis of spectral themes.

For Dickens's life—like one of his novels, with its parallel plot—was ghosted by two central motifs. He is the connoisseur of characters acquiring, in the words of the old cliché, a life of their own—like Dr. Marigold, who "came flashing up in the most cheerful manner, and I had only to look on and leisurely describe it." But he is also the connoisseur of corpses. In Paris, the hidden twin to Dickens's London, his favorite destination was the morgue. Dickens digested the dead with gusto. He was drawn to the morgue—"dragged by invisible force," by "the attraction of repulsion." And this is Dickens's subject, the invention of his style: the uneasy, queasy hinterland where it is alluringly unclear what is alive and what is not.

One day, in 1911, Kafka finished reading a biography of Dickens and then turned to his diary:

> Is it so difficult and can an outsider understand that you experience a story within yourself from its beginning, from the distant point up to the approaching locomotives of steel, coal, and steam, and you don't abandon it even now, but want to be pursued by it and have time for it, therefore are pursued by it and of your own volition run before it wherever it may thrust and wherever you may lure it.

In this marvelous sentence, where the subject writing and the subject written sinuously swap places, Kafka identifies the mobile essence of Dickens's lesson for fiction. His great subject is the force that gives anything animation at all. His work constitutes a sustained examination of the conditions for lifelikeness.

Dickens can animate anything. Even an oyster opener: for what happens to oyster openers, wonders Dickens, in an improvised moment in a letter from Montreal in 1842, when oysters are out of season? "Do they commit suicide in despair, or wrench open tight drawers and cupboards and hermetically-sealed bottles for practice? Perhaps they are dentists out of the oyster season. Who knows?" Dickens's animating style discovers the uncanny energy of the commonplace. For Dickens is the great novelist of junk: the décor of hotel restaurants, the clutter of secondhand shops, the wallpaper in pretentious dance schools. London was supremely the city of the industrial, and the industrial was so savagely modern that it was impossible to keep up: everyone lived among the outmoded, among cherished objects which had lost their use value. This was Dickens's discovery—the surreal poetry of what is obsolete, or seems to be obsolete. His life was spent observing how much a life became a collection of useless, loved objects.

London was the capital of the nineteenth century, and Dickens was its greatest flaneur. In London he walked and walked—making sure of his "fifteen miles a day": "If I couldn't walk fast and far, I should just explode and perish." He was the great ambulatory writer. In particular, he liked to walk at night. Slater's biography records how much he was the genie of gaslight—able to compare, for instance, the quality of gaslight in London and in Paris: "London is shabby by daylight, and shabbier by gaslight. No Englishman knows what gaslight is, until he sees the Rue de Rivoli and the Palais Royal after dark." In Paris, illuminated, Dickens could therefore be found "wandering into Hospitals, Prisons, Dead-houses, Operas, Theatres, Concert Rooms, Burial-grounds, Palaces, and Wine shops"—which all became a private "rapid Panorama." In 1855, he mentions "some of the strange places I glide into of nights in these latitudes." The idea of gliding is wonderful; but then Dickens has a whole vocabulary of flaneuring. In London, he asks a friend to come with him on one of his "great, London, backslums kind of walk[s]."

It was on these walks that Dickens discovered the everyday—his profane illuminations. When his sketches, which first appeared in magazines, were collected in book form, Dickens added a new term, with its hesitant hyphen: "Illustrative of Every-day Life and Everyday People." But the border between his early sketches and his serial fiction is distinctly porous. His style swarms everywhere. And the everyday was "lumber," it was junk:

> The walls were garnished with one or two large maps; and several weather-beaten rough great coats, with complicated capes, dangled from a long row of pegs in one corner. The mantel-shelf was ornamented with a wooden ink-stand, containing one stump of a pen and half a wafer, a road-book and directory, a county history minus the cover, and the mortal remains of a trout in a glass coffin.

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The style of this flaneuring novelist was, then, founded on the observation of the city. Like all great novelists, of course, he tried to occlude the sources of his style. In one of his earliest sketches, "The Prisoner's Van," he included a brief manifesto (which he cut when the piece was collected into a book):

> We have a most extraordinary partiality for lounging about in the streets. Whenever we have an hour to spare, there is nothing that we enjoy more than a little amateur vagrancy—walking up one street and down another, and staring into shop windows, and gazing about us as if, instead of being on intimate terms with every shop and house in Holborn, the Strand, Fleet-street and Cheapside, the whole were an unknown region to our wondering mind.

Dickens had the talent not to be averse to the shameful emotions—prurience, or curiosity, or self-deception, or hypocrisy: the shameful emotions without which no noble knowledge would ever be acquired. His style was formed in the voyeuristic city—London, with "that great heavy canopy," as he wrote to Bulwer Lytton in 1851, "lowering over the housetops." The walker alive to the smoggy city of junk: this was Dickens. And the usefulness of the city was very simple. London was a laboratory where the human was transformed into surface in as concentrated a form as possible. Or, as one of his best critics, John Carey, puts it, Dickens's territory was "the border country between people and things, where Dickens's imagination is mostly engaged." And so it was where everything was always on the point of transforming from the animate into the inanimate, or vice versa. For anything, and anyone, can undergo a metamorphosis: it just depends on the strength of someone else's will, desire, fetish—or belief.

II.

In his novels of reanimation, Dickens went for ghosts, for guilt, for bottled fetuses and effigies: for murder. His necromantic imagination needed corpses. Dead bodies are his constant prop. What else could he do? His subject was how strange the transition was between the live and the dead.

But the motifs are all subject to the mechanics of his sentences. A sentence, for Dickens, was the medium in which he could investigate how reversible lifelikeness was. The effect of Slater's book—so lavishly truffled with quotations from the vast range of his prose—is to emphasize how thoroughly Dickens was inhabited by this process of style. His life was itself a constant experiment of writing, of quickening by form. And so we must take the time to enumerate the elements of Dickens's sentences. They constitute the true events, after all, of any novelist's biography.

In 1869, in his inaugural address as president of the Birmingham & Midland Institute, Dickens confessed something to his audience: "My own invention or imagination, such as it is, I can most truthfully assure you, would never have served me as it has, but for the habit of commonplace, humble, patient, daily, toiling, drudging attention." Drudgery is the ritual of Dickensian transformation. It enabled inspired detailing, such as a slum with its "starved white horse who was making a meal of oyster-shells." And it also produced exuberant squiggles: a child reading the newspapers, "which are so very large in proportion to himself, shorn of his hat, that when he holds up *The Times* to run his eye over the columns, he seems to have retired for the night, and to have disappeared under the bedclothes." And it emerged in the full dense complexity of a sentence like this: "Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun." The sentence describes a comic apocalypse—but then Dickens's style itself may be called a comic apocalypse, energized by the twin engines of personification and metaphor, where everything and everyone can be transformed into the uncannily alive or the uncannily dead. So it becomes impossible to say how far a metaphor is ornament, or instead a precise description of what is seen.

Charles Dickens photographed in reading pose, 1859

Dickens's techniques are constant experiments with what we accept to be real. And so, alongside the metaphoric transformation of the everyday, he loved inversely to transform everyday metaphoric activity into literal sentences. The revolutionary Russian critic Shklovsky once suggested that literary style was there to increase our knowledge of reality: "to lead us to a 'vision' of this object rather than mere 'recognition.'" His example was Tolstoy's baroquely literal description of an opera: "In the middle of the stage sat young girls in red bodices and white skirts. One young girl, very fat, and attired in white silk, was sitting separately on a low bench to which a green cardboard was attached from behind. They were all singing something." But Dickens had been there already—more intensely, poetically literal than Tolstoy—watching *Macbeth* at the Theatre Royal in Chatham, confused by the ontology of double casting: "Many wondrous secrets had I come to the knowledge of in that sanctuary: of which not the least were, that the witches in *Macbeth* bore an awful resemblance to the Thanes and other proper inhabitants of Scotland; and that the good King Duncan couldn't rest in his grave, but was constantly coming out of it and calling himself somebody else."

His sentences are festivals of the flickering, the passing, the dying, the obsolete. He inherits the use of junk allusion invented by the English poets: by Pope, and Swift, and Dryden—the geniuses of mock epic. (Henry Fielding's description of what he was up to in his novels was, significantly, this doubly oxymoronic definition: a "comic Epic-Poem in Prose.") In *The Pickwick Papers*, the everyday kitsch allusion is duly incorporated: " 'Mrs. Leo Hunter has many of these breakfasts, sir,' resumed the new acquaintance—' "feasts of reason, sir, and flows of soul," as somebody who wrote a sonnet to Mrs. Leo Hunter on her breakfasts,

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feelingly and originally observed.'" For what is more junk than unwittingly plagiarizing Pope, the greatest ironist of the glibly serious? But Dickens's true innovation is to incorporate this kitsch appropriation of the classics into his own mobile narrative voice, as in his Hamletian description of

> the Harmonic Meeting at the Sol's Arms; where the sound of the piano through the partly-opened windows jingles out into the court, and where Little Swills, after keeping the lovers of harmony in a roar like a very Yorick, may now be heard taking the gruff line in a concerted piece, and sentimentally adjuring his friends and patrons to Listen, listen, listen, Tew the wa-ter-Fall!

(The Sol's Arms, I should add, whose tables are hyper-realistically "ornamented with glutinous rings in endless involutions, made by pots and glasses.")

The profound innovation of Dickens's style is in this way of describing the human as endless superficiality, infinitely bathetic: a bricolage of bric-a-brac. His profundity is precisely in the refusal of depth. He is often attacked for the creation of caricatures, not characters. As a binary opposition, this seems as uselessly simplistic as Forster's division of characters into the flat and the round. It fails to honor the way his vision of what is real, what is alive, is tense with what is dead. His characters, therefore, are necessarily collections of repetitions. When describing the character of Skimpole in *Bleak House*, Dickens described him as "a delightful manner reproducing itself under my hand." A character, for Dickens, is a self-reproducing entity; as artificial as a self—another system of repetition.

Famously, Dickens's daughter Mamie recorded interrupting her father at composition—when he was, she said, performing a "facial pantomime" in front of the mirror. Dickens did not invent: he imitated, he mimicked. "I don't invent it—really do not, *but see it*, and write it down." Instead of the novel as psychology, he copied out his hallucinations: the repetitive gestures of his characters' bodies, the repetitive jingles of their speech. With these gestures and jingles, he constructed the collages of his scenes:

> "We are all weak creeturs," said Mrs. Corney, laying down a general principle.
>
> "So we are," said the beadle.
>
> Nothing was said, on either side, for a minute or two afterwards. By the expiration of that time, Mr. Bumble had illustrated the position by removing his left arm from the back of Mrs. Corney's chair, where it had previously rested, to Mrs. Corney's apron-string, round which it gradually became entwined.
>
> "We are all weak creeturs," said Mr. Bumble.

Every novel by Dickens is already an illustrated novel. The actual illustrations are just confirmations, tautologies.

III.

But it is not just the sentences. Dickens's form is the novel, after all. His plots, like his sentences, are forms of resurrection. All Dickens's great novels—from *Dombey and Son*, through *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, to *Our Mutual Friend*—use multiple plots that resolve themselves, gradually, into one: characters are reborn under new names, or discover their true bloodline. Each individual plotline seems unrelated. But every novel turns out, in the end, to be a family romance. And this formal property possesses its artisanal double; the resurrections of Dickens's style—from *Dombey and Son* onward—were facilitated by his new way of working: to use folded sheets of paper, divided into sections, to plan out his novels in their serial parts and chapters. With this, he planned the ballet of his characters, the choreography of his plots.

Early in his career, in *Oliver Twist*, Dickens defended the novel as a place for steep transitions—like "all good murderous melodramas" where the comic and the tragic alternate, "as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky bacon." Some readers thought that this was overly dramatic, but for Dickens it was the structure of "real life." The difference was that in real life we did not notice the transitions "from well-spread boards to death-beds, and from mourning weeds to holiday garments," because "there, we are busy actors, instead of passive lookers-on." This principle of transition was the central method by which Dickens constructed a fiction. Like a morgue, it was a system that produced the irony of transition: the abrupt juxtaposition of the living and the dead.

It was a lesson, the reader discovers, that he would learn himself. (Life is so philistine in its exaggerated care for form!) On April 14, 1851, Dickens gave a speech to the General Theatrical Fund dinner, praising the resilience of the actor who came "from scenes of affliction and misfortune—even from death itself—to play his part before us." And then Dickens left the dinner—and was told that his infant daughter, "with whom he had been happily playing just before leaving home," had died.

Life, as always, had a double plot. Later, when he was writing *Little Dorrit*, Dickens wrote a note to himself, wanting to intensify this way in which a plot could enact deaths and resurrections—a plot would be a structure to produce the parallels that would unify the vast city: "People to meet and part as travellers do, and the future connexion between them in the story, not to be now shewn to the reader but to be worked out as in real life. Try this uncertainty and this *not-putting of them* together, as a new means of interest."

In his essay "Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today," written in 1944, Sergei Eisenstein hailed Dickens and his use of the intercut double-plot as the ancestor of cinema—the inventor, in prose narrative, of montage. Montage, after all, depended on parallel action. "Griffith arrived at montage through the method of parallel action, and he was led to the idea of parallel action by—Dickens." Eisenstein went on to describe both "Griffith's montage exposition" and also "a montage progression of parallel scenes, intercut into each other." I admire this invocation of Dickens, alongside the early art of cinema; but it is important to see how Dickens's art of montage was more advanced than Eisenstein's. The idea of the parallel is everywhere in Dickens's notes. In August 1862, about to begin work on *Our Mutual Friend*, he remarked to Forster about his germinating idea of a structure: "bringing together two strongly contrasted places and two strongly contrasted sets of people with which and with whom the story is to rest, through the agency of an electric message."

An electric message! This is Dickens's description of a parallel, and its importance, I think, is this. The parallel allows a novel to become a whole force field, a living and expanding universe—an animating network of motifs—or, in his terms, a network of "shadowings." As he told Wilkie Collins—that other master of melodrama—a plot was an impersonation of fate: "I think the business of Art is to lay all that ground carefully, but with the care that conceals itself—to shew by a backward light, what everything has been working to—but only to SUGGEST, until the

ANTHONY RUSSO

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fulfilment comes. These are the ways of Providence—of which ways, all Art is but a little imitation."

Dickens, the novelist, impersonated Providence. This is another way of saying that he impersonated the city. It is the city, after all, where such fateful parallels happen with the densest rhythm. The city, as Eisenstein knew, is where montage was invented: "that head-spinning tempo of changing impressions with which Dickens sketches the city in the form of a dynamic (montage) picture." London was the capital of the nineteenth century, and its form was montage.

Dickens, it is true, used the montage form to prove that the rich could not separate themselves from the poor, to prove the "connexion" that existed "between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together!" He was hysterically exercised by the way in which civilization could ignore the fact that it was barbaric. Before Walter Benjamin's famous late thesis on history—"there is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism"—Dickens had already noted the inanimate animation. The urban graveyard at the center of the city, "with every villainy of life in action close on death, and every poisonous element of death in action close on life": "a shameful testimony to future ages, how civilization and barbarism walked this boastful island together."

But this does not imply that Dickens had a coherent politics. In his essay, Eisenstein criticized the implications of Griffith's montage: "the structure that is reflected in the concept of Griffith's montage is the structure of bourgeois society.... And this society, perceived *only as a contrast between the haves and the have-nots*, is reflected in the consciousness of Griffith no deeper than the image of an intricate race between two parallel lines." Eisenstein, I assume, would have been similarly infuriated by Dickens. Dickens, after all, annoyed Brecht, and he dismayed Lukács, who lamented "the limitations of Dickens's social criticism, his sometimes abstract-moral attitude towards concrete social-moral phenomena." But why must Dickens have a politics? He was a novelist. He had a style instead.

Dickens's politics was just a mode of feeling. He had been marked, after all, by one particular experience of living death—when he worked at a blacking factory off the Strand in 1824, when he had just turned twelve, and his family was almost bankrupt. Slater records the humiliating everyday detail: along with his partner, Bob Fagin (Fagin!), Dickens worked, with remarkable speed and dexterity, at the window—so remarkably, writes Slater, that passersby "used to stop to stare admiringly in at the window by which they worked." Dickens was transformed into a spectacle. And this experience comprehensively haunted him. Every time Dickens let his imagination become frivolous, the Blacking returned. At Christmas, the Dickens family played a parlor game in which everyone had to remember a sentence made up by the family, and add another phrase. According to his son Henry, "My father, after many turns, had successfully gone through the long string of words, and finished up with his own contribution, 'Warren's Blacking, 30, Strand!'"

A theory of the political in literature needs a theory of feeling: this is a conclusion that may be drawn from the life, and the biography, of Dickens. A theory of junk needs a corresponding theory of the sentimental. The sentimental, after all, is just the junk of feeling, its hollow repetition. Dickens often described himself having "a real good cry" when he wrote. Such outbursts were constant. On April 21, 1849, writing in *The Examiner*, Dickens quoted from an inquiry into a recent scandalous case of children who had died of cholera in a baby farm. When the scandal was uncovered, the surviving children had been taken to the Royal Free Hospital—where the nurses fed them milk and bread. And, Dickens reported, there was a child who could not eat: "No; he held up his hand, and said, 'Oh, nurse, what a big bit of bread this is!'"—"a little touch," added the writer, "of a peculiarly affecting kind, such as the masters of pathos have rarely excelled in fiction."

The masters of pathos: there is real admiration in that phrase. Dickens was not at all embarrassed by the sentimental. And yet he was also an expert in compassion, which was not fake. He institutes the modernist examination of fake and true feeling: what is live and what is not. "I should not like to hear the charge of sentimentality made against this strain that runs through *Bleak House*," observed Nabokov rightly, at his lectern, in his *Lectures on Literature*. "I want to submit that people who denounce the sentimental are generally unaware of what sentiment is." And he added: "Dickens's great art should not be mistaken for a cockney version of the seat of emotion—it is the real thing, keen, subtle, specialized compassion."

Boston University Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
MFA in Creative Writing

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Our program, one of the oldest, most prestigious, and selective in the country, was recently placed among the top ten by *The Atlantic Monthly,* which went on to rank our faculty and our alumni among the top five. The magazine might have been impressed by our two most celebrated workshops—one, in poetry, was led by Robert Lowell, who had scattered around him Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and George Starbuck; the other, much more recent, was led by Leslie Epstein, whose students included Ha Jin, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Peter Ho Davies. Our classes still meet in the same small room, which allows through its dusty windows a glimpse of the Charles. These days, the poetry workshops are led by our regular faculty, Robert Pinsky, Louise Glück, and Rosanna Warren; those in fiction are led by Leslie Epstein, Ha Jin himself, and Allegra Goodman. Our famed playwriting classes are taught by Kate Snodgrass, Ronan Noone, and Melinda Lopez. We are also pleased to add that, thanks to a generous donor, we are launching a new fellowships program that aims to send a good number of our students abroad for a typical stay of 3 months, after completing their intensive workshops here.

It is difficult to know how best to measure a student's success or the worth of a program to a writer. Our graduates have won every major award in each of their genres, including, in playwriting, the Charles MacArthur Award and six national playwriting awards from the American College Theater Festival; in poetry, the Whiting Award, the Norma Farber First Book Award, along with three winners of the Discovery/The Nation Award and two winners of the National Poetry Series; in fiction our graduates have won the Pulitzer Prize, the PEN/Faulkner, the PEN/Hemingway, and the National Book Award. Every month one of our graduates brings out a book of poetry or fiction with a major publisher; and some, like Sue Miller and Arthur Golden, have spent a good deal of time on bestseller lists. Over the last decade we have placed more than a score of our graduates in tenure-track positions at important universities (Peter Ho Davies and Carl Phillips direct the creative writing programs at Michigan and Washington University in St. Louis).

We make, of course, no such assurances. Our only promise to those who join us is of a fair amount of time in that river-view room, time shared with other writers in a common, most difficult pursuit: the perfection of one's craft. For more information about the program, our visiting writers, financial aid, or our new Robert Pinsky Global Fellowships, please write to Director, Creative Writing Program, Boston University, 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215 or visit our website at www.bu.edu/writing/. **Application deadline is March 1, 2010.**

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The compassion is there most decisively in Dickens's generous precision to minor characters. Like, say, Mrs. Piper, who comes to the Sol's Arms in order to present her minor evidence at an inquest:

> Mrs. Piper lives in the court (which her husband is a cabinet-maker), and it has long been well beknown among the neighbours (counting from the day next but one before the half-baptizing of Alexander James Piper aged eighteen months and four days old on accounts of not being expected to live such was the sufferings gentlemen of that child in his gums) as the Plaintive—so Mrs. Piper insists on calling the deceased—was reported to have sold himself.

Mrs. Piper is just a flicker in that vast electric network that Dickens called *Bleak House*—and she is permanent. With Mrs. Piper, the reader comes upon the center of Dickens's life-giving style, in the care lavished so quickly on lesser figures. For there is also truth in cliché, in the way a self freezes into its gestures. In the end, the self can be content with very little—like a cabman who is given twopence, which he receives "with anything but transport, tosses the money into the air, catches it over-handed, and retires." Nabokov commented: "this gesture, this one gesture, with its epithet 'over-handed'—a trifle—but the man is alive forever in a good reader's mind." And then he added: "A great writer's world is indeed a magic democracy where even some very minor character . . . has the right to live and breed." This, in the end, is the flimsy, ethereal, convincing politics of Dickens's prose: not in his speeches, or his newspaper campaigns, but in the democracy of his fiction, in its massive crowd of animate extras.

IV.

The medium in which these minor characters lived was the mixing and refining solution of Dickens's voice. Among all the Dickensian system of repetitions, the most repeated element is Dickens himself: his prose style. At his audience with Queen Victoria in 1870, he may have commiserated sedately over "the price of butchers' meat, and bread," but he was really a revolution of one. And the key to this revolution, to this style, may be found in his performances.

Around 1843, when he was writing *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens changed the way he wrote. He developed a more performative system of punctuation: a musical notation of semicolons. And it was also in *A Christmas Carol* that Dickens allowed his prose to become an electric message between the novelist and the absent reader: "Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them: as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow." When he came to give his famous performed readings, he chose to begin with *A Christmas Carol*—but he cut that passage, because at last there was no need to remind the absent reader of the absent novelist's presence.

Before he became a novelist, Dickens had considered becoming an actor. With his assiduous precision, he had practiced "even such things as walking in and out, and sitting down in a chair." His hero was Charles Matthews, who would come on stage as himself, in evening dress—and then play all the parts, culminating in a final bravura "monopolylogue." It was an early form of stand-up. And this solo performance of multiple imitations formed the nucleus of Dickens's style: a new form of prose, based on mimicry.

Mimicry, of course, is based on an idea of the human as repetition. "How easily peculiarities may be acquired by negligence," observed Matthews, "and how difficult they are to eradicate when strengthened by habit." Dickens made this offhand observation central to the art of the novel: a sustained analysis of how far the repetitive is the essence of a character, or the appropriation of a self by the other. Dickens is the great comic impersonator. In the vocabulary of the nineteenth century, he is the great assumer. He impersonated other people, and he impersonated himself. This is why his biography is of such prickly and absorbing interest. He performed his own multiple imagination.

He wanted to be ghostly. He liked the idea of the novelist as ghost—as in his idea of an editing persona for his magazine, *Household Words*: "I want to suppose a certain SHADOW . . . a kind of semi-omniscient, omnipresent, intangible creature" which would "loom as a fanciful thing all over London . . . a sort of previously unthought of Power going about." But this was simply a way of describing his infinite vampiric style. And the main subject he haunted was himself. This was the secret he imparted to a Russian admirer, another genius of "good murderous melodramas," who came to interview him in the summer of 1862. Dostoevsky, who was not yet the author of *Crime and Punishment* or *Demons* or any of his major novels, later recounted Dickens's theory:

> There were two people in him, he told me: one who feels as he ought to feel and one who feels the opposite. From the one who feels the opposite I make my evil characters, from the one who feels as a man ought to feel I try to live my life. Only two people? I asked.

Toward the end of his life, Dickens decided to add to his repertory of readings the murder of Nancy by her lover Bill Sikes in *Oliver Twist*. In performance, he continued to create the tale, to embellish the novel, adding extra detail—such as Sikes's dog, his paws bloodstained, "crawling as if those stains had poisoned him!!" Famously, his enactment of the guilty murderer made Dickens feel like a murderer: he wrote to the painter Frith in November 1868 that his acting was "horribly like, I am afraid"—"I have a vague sense of being 'wanted' as I walk about the streets." A short while earlier, in April 1867, Dickens had written to his friend Robert Lytton that with his performed readings, with "this interpretation of myself (then quite strange in the public ear)," he had hoped to hint at "some new expression of the meaning of my books." The new meaning, I think, was simple. It was the living proof that Dickens—with gas jets rigged up to shine brightly on his face, because he was, after all, the flaneur of gaslight—had invented the narrator as impersonator.

From Paris, on May 16, 1863, Dickens published an essay in his magazine *Household Words*. His essay featured the Paris morgue. In particular, it noted the variety of expressions adopted by the tourists when looking at the corpses (adopted by the flaneur, looking at the world):

> there was a wolfish stare at the object. . . . And there was a much more general, purposeless, vacant staring at it—like looking at waxwork, without a catalogue, and not knowing what to make of it. But all these expressions concurred in possessing the one underlying expression of *looking at something that could not return a look.*

The Paris morgue was the hidden, concentrated form of London—of life. In the horrified italics of this asymmetrical looking, where the world is observed in the form of a waxwork, the disturbed energy of Dickens's art and life may be found. So horrified by the inanimate, by the world's junk, Dickens gave himself the infinite task of quickening everything, of impersonating everything—a demiurgic task of animation, through the precarious immortality of art. ◆

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Robert M. Solow

HEDGING AMERICA

HOW MARKETS FAIL: THE LOGIC OF ECONOMIC CALAMITIES
By John Cassidy
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 390 pp., $28)

One tried-and-true way to start off a course in elementary economics is to call the students' attention to a common object, such as the spiral notebooks in which they are presumably busy taking notes. Somewhere paper is manufactured with the appropriate strength and slickness, somewhere else it is cut into blocks of the right size, the corners rounded, printed with lines about the right distance apart, provided with cardboard covers in the college colors, punched with the right number of holes, bound with those wire spirals that have been manufactured in yet another place, and delivered in reasonable numbers to the college bookstore at the beginning of each term. And all this happens smoothly, without any centralized direction, through the normal operation of a market economy. How does it really work? And how can it go wrong?

My late colleague Evsey Domar, who was, among other things, a student of the Soviet economy, told us how the planning bureau began by setting production quotas for paper factories in tons per year. The result was paper so thick that it could not fit in a Soviet typewriter or anywhere else. So the clever planning bureau changed to setting quotas in terms of square meters per year. The result was paper so thin that even a member of the planning bureau could see right through it. The lesson is that it is so much simpler and more effective to tell paper producers that they have to compete to sell their paper to notebook manufacturers (who are also competing with each other), and live off the proceeds.

If this is how more or less free, more or less competitive markets can deal with something as simple as a spiral notebook, how much more remarkable it is that they can do the same for something as complicated as a computer or a refrigerator. But there seems to be no other practical way to run a modern economy efficiently. That is what Adam Smith understood: a competitive market economy, motivated primarily by individual pecuniary self-interest, can produce coordination where one might expect only chaos.

He invented for that process the memorable image of the Invisible Hand. In the following two centuries and more, an army of economists has spent an enormous amount of time and intellectual effort refining and elaborating Smith's initial insight, teasing out exactly how far that logic can be carried, how the hand operates, investigating when and how it breaks down, and elucidating odd or complex special cases such as professional team sports, or Internet services, or health care. (A recent issue of the highbrow *American Economic Review* contains highly technical articles aimed at understanding particular aspects of oil prices, gasoline taxes, urban transit, art auctions, and "two-sided matching markets" like that connecting graduate students and graduate schools.)

In one way it is an interesting intellectual game; in another, it is a deadly serious battle for very high stakes. For in the course of producing and distributing goods and services, market outcomes generate incomes, wealth, status, and power. Any modification of market outcomes modifies the allocation of incomes, wealth, status, and power. So it is no wonder that the discussion has become thickly encrusted with ideology. And one convenient way to turn subtle argument into ideology is to create dichotomies where there are originally fine gradations of more and less. For example: are you for or against "the free market"?

Today, of course, no one is against markets. The only legitimate questions are: What are their limitations? Can they go wrong? If so, how can we distinguish the ones that do from the ones that don't? What can be done to fix the ones that do go wrong? When is some regulation needed, how much, and what kind? More broadly: how to protect the economy and society against specified tendencies to market failure without losing much of either the capacity of a market system to coordinate economic activity efficiently or its ability to stimulate and reward technological and other innovations that lead to economic progress?

The subtitle of John Cassidy's book illustrates the problem. Most market failures—they occur every day—are not even nearly calamities. They start with the existence of partial monopoly power in this or that industry, with the result that the market price is "too high" and the rate of production "too low" in the precise sense that everyone could be made better off if that error were corrected. They extend to cases where the market does not impose the full costs of their actions on certain producers and consumers, with the result that economic activity is misdirected: the consequences may be minor (a small amount of pollution) or major (fish stocks collapse from overfishing) or potentially catastrophic (climate change from excessive unpenalized emission of greenhouse gases). And what are we to make of the stock-market collapse of October 1987, the largest one-day fall ever on the New York Stock Exchange? It was in one sense a calamity, but it left essentially no trace in the "real" economy of production, employment, consumption, and everyday life. Evidently being for or against "free markets" does not come close to being an adequate response to the problems that arise in a complex modern economy.

Cassidy, who writes on economics and finance for *The New Yorker*, yields a bit too easily to the journalist's instinct to set this issue up as a battle of Light against Darkness. The first two parts of his book contrast what he calls "Utopian Economics" with "Reality-based Economics." In fact he is aware of some of the qualifications and fine distinctions that fact and logic call for, and a careful reader will come away with at least a general feeling for the difficulties facing any serious attempt to understand the working of market economies. The last part of the book is a retelling of the financial meltdown of 2007–2009, from which the world is only beginning to emerge. Cassidy casts it as a story of Utopian Economics Carried Much Too Far.

There is a certain amount of truth in that characterization. By "utopian economics," Cassidy means, in the first instance, the careful elaboration of the precise scope of Adam Smith's Invisible Hand. It turns out to be a lot more complicated and attenuated than sloganeering can afford to acknowledge. To begin with, if a market economy is to be advertised as doing an acceptable job, we need a definition of a good economic outcome.

The standard version says that one allocation of goods and services to individuals (call it A) is better than another

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(B) if *everyone* is at least as well off (in his or her own estimation) in A as in B, and at least one person is better off. So there is to be no trading off of one person's well-being against another's. That sounds fair; but notice that judgments about inequality are ruled out: if everyone is equal but poor in A, and B differs only by making one person fabulously rich, B is better than A. That sounds a little less appetizing, but this extreme case underscores the individualistic nature of the whole exercise: nothing is supposed to matter to anyone but his or her own access to goods and services. Notice also that, by this definition, most As and Bs simply cannot be compared: some people are better off and some worse off in A than in B, so neither is "better" than the other.

The next step is to say that such an allocation is "efficient" if no feasible allocation can leave everybody at least as well off as they were and make somebody better off. In other words, there is no "better" allocation. You would like your economy to lead to an efficient outcome. There are many efficient allocations, some egalitarian and some just the opposite, and none of them is better or worse than any of the others. They cannot be said to be equal either; they are simply not comparable in this language.

It is important to understand what this definition does not mean: it does not say that any efficient allocation is better, more desirable, than any inefficient one. Why not? Suppose you happen to gain from the inefficiency and I happen to lose. Then eliminating the inefficiency does not meet the test for a "better" state: you lose and I gain. More concretely: suppose your favorite plumber would gladly work an extra hour for $50, and suppose that you would gladly pay $50 for the work that she would do in that hour. It would be a socially useful transaction, if no one else were affected. But if your plumber pays a 20 percent marginal tax rate, she would clear only $40, and then this socially useful transaction does not happen. An income tax is "distortionary." It creates an inefficiency. But now imagine that the tax revenues are used to provide education or health care or other benefits to poor or disabled or otherwise deserving people who would otherwise have to do without. Then one cannot say that the no-tax efficient allocation is better than the inefficient one. Some other criterion has to be invoked.

I have insisted on these gory—or dreary—details for a reason. Careful analysis shows that, if there are no distortions (and under further assumptions, to be discussed in a moment), a competitive market economy in equilibrium will achieve an efficient allocation of resources. That much is, so to say, a theoretical fact, and Cassidy lays it out well. Now comes the layer of ideology: advocates, some of whom may know better, use the "efficiency of free markets" to argue against taxes and regulation in general—they are distortions—and in favor of laissez-faire. Any interference with the free market, they declaim, is ipso facto a bad thing.

There are at least two things wrong with this ploy. The first has already been discussed. If a tax or regulation creates an inefficiency, "better" outcomes are available, but the pre-tax or pre-regulation situation is very unlikely to be among them. Some group will have gained from the regulation or from the tax and the use of its revenues. Finding and achieving one of the better outcomes requires thought and judgment. "Just say no" is not good policy. Perhaps I should be explicit also on the other side: many taxes and regulations create large inefficiencies for very little gain. The point is that no blanket statement is possible.

The second reason is that the Invisible Hand Theorem is valid only under certain assumptions, some of which only need to be stated to be seen as very dodgy. Clarifying those assumptions is the role of Cassidy's "reality-based economics." One of them is the absence of distorting taxes and regulations. Another is the absence of elements of monopoly, or monopolistic imperfections that fall well short of monopoly, like catchy brand names or advertising gimmicks that give a seller some freedom in setting prices, or other barriers to competition. Of course such imperfections are ubiquitous in every modern economy. The existence of economies of large-scale production in some industries is already a deal breaker for the Invisible Hand, and they make some element of monopoly essentially inevitable.

And that is far from the end of the matter. The informational requirements for the validity of the Invisible Hand Theorem are considerable. All buyers and sellers must have access to the same information, preferably complete information, and they must be able to process the relevant information, and they must be willing and able to behave rationally in the light of it. (Unpacking the notion of "rationality" in this context would be tedious: it involves having con-

Word Game

Better to wear an archaic smile
than to play with the word Time. Play with the rain,
play on a see-saw, play with your dogs awhile.
Reading your face or the cracked face of a mountain
is not reading Time, is reading only for style.
Footprints show the trace of a man, not his person.
Clocks and history are cheap imitation,
make a piece of ass of the moon and sun.
Older than darkness, Time is a grand personage
who lived before hunger and thirst, died without language—
the first player and surely the last upon the stage.
Older than space and light, time is here and not here,
loveless, close to and distant from everything.
What song would the moon sing, if it could sing?
Was there a Big Bang or a primordial clavier
when there was nothing: a restless ghost, nothing.
They say four rivers flowed out of Eden,
no tears, despite the serpent.
How can I explain Time with a pen?
Time is simply when and then—
when darkness and light are absent,
the only survivor in the firmament,
always present.

STANLEY MOSS

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sistent, non-contradictory preferences about one's consumption of goods and services, and knowing how to find one's way to the most preferred among all feasible configurations.)

Yet another requirement is the absence of significant external effects or "externalities." An externality occurs whenever one person's or one firm's behavior directly affects the well-being of other persons or firms positively or negatively without the first party bearing the costs or being remunerated for the costs or benefits that it inflicts or bestows on the others. Thus, if my chemical plant is allowed freely to stink up the neighborhood, there will be more such chemicals produced than the Invisible Hand would like. And if others can read the scientific literature and use the results of your basic research without paying you for it, there will be less basic research done than would be efficient. Again, externalities are ubiquitous in a densely populated modern economy. Some taxes and subsidies, instead of being distortions, are designed to correct the distortions that arise from such externalities (carbon taxes, cap-and-trade systems), and many regulations are intended to prevent or minimize negative externalities (no pig farms in city limits, no billboards in scenic areas).

Faced with this list of obstacles, one might be tempted to give up on the market economy altogether. That would be as much of a mistake as the one made by doctrinaire free marketeers. The real point is that the choice is not either/or, but when and how much. Many distortions, imperfections, and externalities are small. To try to correct them all would be intolerably bureaucratic. The large ones cannot be wished away or ignored for reasons of piety; they cause large inefficiencies, and they can redistribute income in ways that most people would reject. And so there is no good alternative to case-by-case decision-making. I think Cassidy gives this a reasoned treatment.

Earlier I skated over the issue of rationality, but Cassidy is not so abstemious. He is fond of a notion that he calls "rational irrationality." He refers in this way to situations in which rational choices by each individual lead to a kind of collective irrationality. There are relatively benign examples of this: if those in the front row at a football game stand up at an exciting moment, those in the second row will be forced to stand up in order to see at all, and then the third row, until in the end everyone is standing and everyone would see just as well if everyone were comfortably sitting down.

There are also dangerous examples: we all know that if we each dash for the exit at a hint of fire in a crowded theater, the likely result is a stampede, congestion, and fatalities, but we are individually tempted anyway, and such disasters sometimes happen. A managed—regulated—exit will be better. Financial markets are especially vulnerable to this kind of herd behavior, especially in the presence of asymmetries in information. The panic seller (or frantic buyer) next door may know something that I don't know. Technically, this sort of herd behavior leads to the instability of a market system. The market reacts destructively to small disturbances even if, at rest, it does a fairly good job. Market instability can be very damaging, as a long succession of financial crises has demonstrated.

Serious evaluation of the capacities and the failures of idealized market economies, and of the circumstances that tend to lead them in one direction or the other, is useful work, given that market economies of one kind or another are all that we are likely to experience. Nor is that kind of work necessarily auto-intoxicating: it does not automatically infect those who do it with some blind infatuation with "free markets." In fact, the most profound inquirers into the properties of market systems have not been free marketeers, not in this sloganeering sense. One of them remarked to me that his goal in pursuing this trail has been to show just how special and stringent the assumptions are that are required to make the Invisible Hand work well.

The market evangelists, who tend to claim more for unregulated markets than solid theory can justify, are ideologically motivated. They dislike and distrust governments so much that they overlook the exceptions and the implausible assumptions, and simply propose the blanket principle that the market knows best. What is improper in this manner of argument is the frequent casual hint that it is authorized by economic theory. Nothing so general is ever authorized by economic theory.

Cassidy provides an interesting selective survey of the other side—the analysis of whole classes of situations in which the unregulated market is bound to fail, in the sense that it will lead to inefficient outcomes. This is what he calls "reality-based" economics. That is a tendentious label, of course. Since markets do not always fail, some of what is said about well-functioning markets is "reality-based," too.

Economics has a long history of studies of generic causes of market failure, and sometimes also of possible remedies. Pollution of the environment, both local and global, can be met by corrective taxation. (Positive externalities—basic research is an important example—should attract, and have attracted, public subsidy.) The analysis of monopoly was begun by A. A. Cournot about sixty years after Adam Smith, and a theory of imperfect competition dates from the 1930s. There the remedy, when it has been applied, has been breakup or regulation. More difficult cases of strategic behavior had to wait for the tools of game theory, developed after World War II. Cassidy mentions all these, plus asymmetric information, systematic deviations from rationality, and more.

It makes interesting reading, but I wish he had asked himself an additional question. Why, in the marketplace (*sic*!) of ideas, have the evangelists for the unrestricted market attracted so much attention and the "realists" so little? He argues, fairly convincingly, that the truth does not lie predominantly on that side of the issue. So is it that believers always make more effective advocates than skeptics do? Are we for some reason more receptive to simple answers than to complex ones? Is it that, in the nature of the case, there is more money backing one side than the other? Perhaps the long postwar prosperity provided good growing conditions for conservative political and economic ideology. If so, it will be interesting to see if the current recession and financial meltdown leave traces in the course of serious economics.

The last third of Cassidy's book is in fact about "The Great Crunch." The story of the current financial crisis is told not primarily as narrative, although there is some of that, but as an illustration of the failure of the dogma of the self-correcting market. The argument against regulating hedge funds, private equity firms, and the like was that the participants in those markets were expert, knowledgeable managers of wealth. Since they had a lot at stake, they would be motivated and able to estimate risks fairly, foresee pitfalls, price accordingly, and keep each other honest. In fact, as Cassidy shows, incentives were often perverse, short-run greed overcame long-run caution, information was hidden or badly processed, and the complexity of financial engineering outran

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the capacity for rational calculation. "Rational irrationality" and herd behavior led to disaster. In the case of financial markets, the "realists" have by now perhaps won out over the "utopians."

It is nice that Cassidy is able to use the story of the financial crisis to exemplify some of the systematic sources of egregious market failure. But there is a deeper, or at least prior, question that he does not take up. Is all this financial activity socially useful, even in the absence of breakdown? It is worth a moment's thought.

Cassidy quotes Alan Greenspan:

> Recent regulatory reform coupled with innovative technologies has spawned rapidly growing markets for, among other products, asset-backed securities, collateral loan obligations, and credit derivative default swaps. These increasingly complex financial instruments have contributed, especially over the recent stressful period, to the development of a far more flexible, efficient, and hence resilient financial system than existed just a quarter-century ago.

Flexible maybe, resilient apparently not, but how about efficient? How much do all those exotic securities, and the institutions that create them, buy them, and sell them, actually contribute to the "real" economy that provides us with goods and services, now and for the future? The main social purpose of the financial system—banks, securities markets, lending institutions, and the rest—is to allocate society's pool of accumulated savings, its capital, to the most productive available uses. It does a lot of this, beyond doubt.

We would be much poorer without a functioning financial system, and the flow of credit and equity purchases that it permits. If anyone who wanted to start a business—a software company, a biotechnology laboratory, a retail store—had to do so with his or her already saved-up wealth and the help of relatives, many good ideas would go unrealized, and some wealth would lie idle or be wasted. If every time you chose to invest in an existing company it was forever, because there was no way to sell your share and invest somewhere else, it would be much harder for promising enterprises to attract capital and grow.

But those needs were being taken care of a quarter-century ago, and well before that. The real question, to which Greenspan gave such a confident and grandiose answer, is whether anything much was added to the system's ability to allocate capital efficiently by the advent of naked CDSs and CDOs and the rest of the alphabet. No blanket answer is possible. The securitization of mortgages and college loans is not intrinsically a foolish or useless idea—it enlarges the pool of capital available to finance home purchases and college educations; but the opportunity for you and me to bet a large sum of money on the outcome of somebody else's bond issue is not nearly the same sort of thing.

Take an extreme example. I have read that a firm such as Goldman Sachs has made very large profits from having devised ways to spot and carry out favorable transactions minutes or even seconds before the next most clever competitor can make a move. Deep pockets in a large market can make a lot of money out of tiny advantages. (Of course, if you have any such advantage the temptation is irresistible to borrow a lot of money to enlarge your bets and your profits. Leverage is good for you, until it isn't. It is not so good for the system.) A lot of high-class intellectual effort naturally goes into trying to invent ways to find those tiny advantages a few seconds before anyone else.

Now ask yourself: can it make any serious difference to the real economy whether one of those profitable anomalies is discovered now or a half-minute from now? It can be enormously profitable to the financial services industry, but that may represent just a transfer of wealth from one person or group to another. It remains hard to believe that it all adds anything much to the efficiency with which the real economy generates and improves our standard of living.

If that suspicion is valid—I emphasize that the necessary calculations have not been made and will be hard to make—the conclusion would be that our poorly regulated financial system is not only dangerously unstable, but also too big and too complex, absorbing talent and resources that could be better used doing something else. What is inadmissible is the assumption that, if the market creates a large and convoluted financial system, the market must be right. John Cassidy's book should confer on a thoughtful reader a lasting immunity to erroneous free-market sloganeering, whether simpleminded or devious, while still conveying some feeling for what a well-functioning market system can actually do. Both ideas are important. ◆

Hillel Halkin
INDECENT PROPOSAL

THE INVENTION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE
By Shlomo Sand
Translated by Yael Lotan
(Verso, 400 pp., $34.95)

By the books an age reads and respects ye shall know it. What, then, shall we say of an age in which a book so intellectually shoddy that once, not very long ago, it would have been flunked as an undergraduate thesis by any self-respecting professor of history becomes a best-seller upon first appearing in Hebrew in Israel in 2008; goes on to win the prestigious Aujourd'hui Award of the association of French journalists; and now, in English translation, is taken seriously by reviewers and reporters, and nets its author an honored place on talk shows and in "advanced" opinion? Perhaps one might charitably say that such an age is forgetful and poorly educated and credulous. And to be fair, *The Invention of the Jewish People* does make one valid point. But let's begin with the shoddiness.

Sand's book is about Jewish nationhood, Jewish nationalism, and Zionism—each of which, in the best postmodern fashion and with due acknowledgment to such well-known theorists of national identity formation as Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, Sand seeks to "deconstruct" by viewing it as an artificially cobbled modern notion rather than as a historically rooted phenomenon. This he does by means of two shopworn arguments, one completely absurd and one partly so.

The first argument is that because the world's dispersed Jews were united, until modern times, only by their religious beliefs and practices, there was never any such thing as a "Jewish people," just as there was never any such thing as a Catholic people or a Protestant people. Jews, Sand writes, developed a "national consciousness" only in the nineteenth cen-

Hillel Halkin's new book, Yehuda Halevi, will be published by Schocken in February.

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tury, its first formulators being religiously lapsed European Jewish intellectuals:

> Mostly products of rabbinical schools, educated Jews who were feeling the effects of the secular age and whose metaphysical faith was beginning to show a few cracks longed for another source to reinforce their uncertain, crumbling identity. The religion of history struck them as an appropriate substitute for religious faith, but for those who, sensibly, could not embrace the national mythologies [of various European peoples] rising before their eyes … the only option was to invent and adhere to a parallel national mythology, [one that] turned into a determined march [toward Jewish nationhood] in the imagining of a Jewish people.

Feeling excluded by the intensifying nineteenth-century nationalisms of the peoples among whom they lived, the Jews conjured themselves into a people, too. Sand even knows who the ur-conjuror was. He was Heinrich Graetz, the German-Jewish historian, whose multi-volume *History of the Jews from the Oldest Times to the Present* began to appear in the 1850s. "This was the first work," according to Sand, "that strove, with consistency and feeling, to invent the Jewish people.… Henceforth, for many people, Judaism would no longer be a rich and diverse religious civilization that managed to survive despite all difficulties and temptations in the shadows of giants, and became an ancient people or race that was uprooted from its homeland in Canaan and arrived … at the gates of Berlin."

Graetz was the first, but not the last. He and his followers, Sand informs us, prepared the intellectual ground for Zionism, which, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, claimed Palestine for its newly imagined "people or race." And if Zionism is thus the invention of an invention, the state of Israel, built on the myth of a "Jewish ethnos," is the invention of an invention of an invention. The clear implication is that a country existing at a third remove from reality is hardly legitimate.

Long a staple of Arab and anti-Zionist propaganda, this argument is the exact opposite of the truth. What was invented at the outset of modernity was not Jewish peoplehood, which—as all the evidence that has come down to us amply bears out—had been taken for granted throughout history by Jews and gentiles alike. It was Jewish *non*-peoplehood, whose first important formulator was the eighteenth-century French count Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre. A leader of the fight for Jewish emancipation at the time of the French Revolution, it was Clermont-Tonnerre who famously declared that French Jews should be "granted everything as individuals and denied everything as a nation." His Jewish countrymen, he declared, should be treated as Frenchmen of the Jewish faith, on the analogy of Frenchmen of the Catholic or Protestant faiths—and also, on that of the Germans, Poles, and Englishmen of the Jewish faith with whom they shared a religious confession. Although this was not an analysis that immediately convinced many Christians, who were slow to emancipate Jews outside of France, it soon became the motto of the rapidly growing ranks of assimilationist and Reform Jews all over Europe.

And yet while Clermont-Tonnerre believed that the Jews should cease to be a separate people, he would not have disagreed with the opponents of emancipation that they still were one. How could he have, when Judaism, which in his age nearly all of them still observed, had always insisted that it was God's covenant not merely, like Christianity, with the individuals who accepted it, but with all the descendants, whether they accepted it or not, of the Israelites who stood at Mount Sinai? "Until Your people crossed over, O Lord, till the people [*am*] You made Yours [*kanita*] crossed over," says the Song of the Sea in the Book of Exodus, by all accounts one of the oldest biblical passages—and while the Hebrew verb *kanita* can also be rendered as "You acquired," *am*, a word used hundreds of times in the Bible to describe both the Israelites and their neighbors, can only mean "people." There is simply no other way to translate it.

Judaism, whether it is nearly four thousand years old, as biblical chronology would have it, or only 2,500 years old, as the revisionist Bible critics favored by Sand maintain, is inseparable from a Jewish "national consciousness." Believing Jews throughout the ages have never doubted for a moment that they belonged to an *am yisra'el*, a people of Israel—nor, in modern times, have non-believing Jews with strong Jewish identities. It is precisely this that constitutes such an identity. Far from inventing Jewish peoplehood, Zionism was a modern re-conceptualization of it that was based on its long-standing prior existence.

It is of course true, as Sand delights in observing, that the claims made for Jewish peoplehood have been different from those made for other national groups. A religiously traditional Jew in nineteenth-century Poland did not share with a traditional Jew in Morocco all that a Frenchman in Paris shared with a Frenchman in Toulouse. The two Jews inhabited different continents, were ruled by different governments, spoke different languages, lived in different material cultures, and had different social mores.

But it is not quite so simple. After all, the differences between nineteenth-century Frenchmen were not necessarily slight, either: one might be a Catholic and one a Protestant, one a speaker of standard French and one of dialect, one urban and one rural, one royalist and one republican, one northern and one Mediterranean. And conversely, the differences between our two Jews were not necessarily that great. Both were acutely conscious of being unlike their gentile neighbors; both spoke their own language or dialect, much of its distinctiveness due to the many Hebrew words in it; if sufficiently educated, they were able to communicate in Hebrew itself; and they had a jointly acknowledged though unvisited national homeland in the Land of Israel.

Above all, each would have immediately recognized the other as a kinsman. And since their religion permeated the entirety of their daily lives, these lives had a great deal in common, too. Besides attending practically identical synagogue services on Saturday morning (and even all week long) and then making the same blessings and singing more or less the same hymns around the Sabbath table, a nineteenth-century Polish and Moroccan Jew also ate a very similar long-simmering stew—called *cholent* in Poland and *dafina* in Morocco—whose method of preparation was dictated by the same ritual laws. And though few Frenchmen were so attached to being French that they would have forbidden a son or daughter to marry an otherwise eligible and attractive foreigner, Jews everywhere broke off all relations with children who married non-Jews.

To say that Jewish national identity was rooted in religion is not to say that it was merely religious. And in any case, for someone convinced, after Anderson and Gellner, that all national identities are "imagined" ones imposed on populations at some point in their history by ruling or intellectual elites, what does any of this matter? If nationhood or peoplehood is ultimately determined by subjective perceptions, Sand is barking up the wrong tree by laboring to prove that Jews lacked the objective qualifications for it. By his

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own standards, all that should count is what Jews felt and thought about themselves—and in all the enormous corpus of pre-nineteenth-century Jewish literature (from which, for understandable reasons, Sand does not quote), Jewish peoplehood is never treated as anything but an unchallenged and unchallengeable fact.

Were Jews always as scrupulous about preserving the purity of their bloodlines as was the nineteenth-century Polish or Moroccan Jew who said the mourner's kaddish for the child who married out? Not at all, contends Sand in his second argument against the historical reality of a Jewish people. The notion that Jews share a lineage going back to biblical times is, he claims, a false one. Not only was much of ancient Jewry never exiled from Palestine, in which it remained and converted to Christianity and Islam in antiquity or the early Middle Ages, but large numbers of non-Jews in the Diaspora entered the Jewish fold in the same period—in at least some cases, it would seem, without undergoing the formal conversion process required by rabbinic Judaism.

Sand dwells at length on the better known of these episodes, all partially or wholly ignored by rabbinic literature: the Edomites of southern Palestine, forced to convert by the Hasmonean King John Hyrcanus in 125 B.C.E.; the numerous "God-fearers" of the Roman Empire, gentiles attracted to Judaism who often slipped unobtrusively into its ranks; the inhabitants of Yemen who became Jews under the Judaizing Himyarite kings of the fourth and fifth centuries; the Jewish Berber tribes of North Africa before its seventh-century Muslim conquest; the Khazars, a Turkic people living between the Caspian and Black seas, whose royal house embraced Judaism in the eighth century; and so on. Far from having common biblical ancestors, he argues, most contemporary Jews would discover, if they could go far back enough in time, that they have diverse non-Jewish ones.

But in fact we can go far back in time, with the help of historical DNA studies, which have burgeoned in the last twenty years, and the most disgraceful pages in Sand's book are those in which he displays an ignorant disdain for the work that has been done in this field by serious investigators. Without the least apparent understanding of how historical genetics works or what it can tell us, he attacks some of its most distinguished practitioners, such as Batsheva Bonné-Tamir of Tel Aviv University, Karl Skorecki of the Haifa Technion, and Doron Behar of the Rappaport Institute, for "internalizing the Zionist myth" and "seeking at all costs to discover a biological homogeneity" in order to create a "new discipline" designed to confirm "the Zionist idea of the Jewish nation-race." Having myself worked for many years on a research project with Skorecki and Behar, I can testify that this impugning of their scientific integrity is libelous.

The irony is that the genetic studies that Sand dismisses lend him a measure of support. Overall, they show that while there is a high Y-chromosome correlation with an eastern Mediterranean profile among Jewish men from most parts of the world, indicating that many of them do have common Palestinian ancestors, the mitochondrial DNA correlation of Jewish women is much lower. Or, in less technical terms: while male gentiles have on the average entered Diaspora Jewish communities in only small percentages per generation over time, female gentiles—presumably because they were local inhabitants taken for wives by Jewish men in places like Yemen or North Africa—have done so more significantly.

But again: so what? There is nothing explosive about this. Judaism has always made it clear that the Jewish people is not biologically exclusive and can be joined by outsiders. And taking Sand on his own terms, what does any of this have to do with Jewish peoplehood, or with Zionism? If our Polish Jew included among his distant ancestors Khazars who became Jews in the eighth century, and our Moroccan Jew counted seventh-century Berber tribesmen among his forbears, why should this have weakened the nineteenth-century ties between them, or their attachment to an ancient homeland from which others of their ancestors did come, or their desire to see Jewish independence restored there? Sand, who studied at the École des hautes études in Paris and has written a book on Georges Sorel, would snort derisively if told that Sorel's fellow Frenchmen were not a people because some of their progenitors were indigenous Celts while others were Germanic or Roman invaders. Yet when it comes to the Jews, he asks us to take a similar proposition seriously.

While he does not trouble to interrogate (as he might say) his own beliefs, Sand does reveal something about their origins. He is, he tells us in his introduction, the admiring Israeli-born grandson of an anti-Zionist Polish Jewish communist, and as a young man growing up in the 1960s in mixed Arab-Jewish Jaffa he dreamed of leaving Israel forever. Two of his closest friends were a Jaffa Arab and a young Arab writer from Haifa named Mahmoud Darwish. After his army service, in the course of which, in the Six Day War, he "had to shoot at the enemy and intimidate terrified inhabitants," he went off to Paris to study modern European history, determined to "abandon everything" Israeli. Yet in the end, he writes, speaking of himself in the third person,

> despite the alienation [that he felt from Israel], he was overcome by longing for the city in which he had grown up, and so he returned to the painful place where his identity was forged. His homeland, claiming to be the "State of the Jewish people," received him willingly. As for the rebellious poet who had been born on its soil, and the old friend [from Jaffa]—the state was too narrow to include them [and they emigrated].

By then, however, Israel had changed. The country to which Sand returned, and in which he married the daughter of a non-Jewish Spanish anarchist who was married to an Israeli woman, now teemed with post- and anti-Zionist intellectuals. Like him, they objected to what they considered Israel's Jewish ethnocentricity; like him, too, they thought that the "state of the Jewish people" should become a "state of all its citizens." By the early 1990s, the attitudes that had made Sand feel like an outsider in the Israel of the 1960s were chic, in the academy and beyond. Many had their justification in fashionable theories of nationalism, colonialism, racism, and the rejection of Otherness that originated in the France he had studied in. Mahmoud Darwish was now a renowned Palestinian poet. The zeitgeist and the Sand-geist were the same. Why *The Invention of the Jewish People* was not already written then, I don't know. Perhaps Sand—who, while denying the existence of a Jewish people, never doubts that of a Palestinian one, even though no serious historian disputes that Palestinian national consciousness is a product of late modern times—was waiting to see if the winds of fashion would shift again. Since then, however, they have only blown harder.

As I said, Sand makes one valid point. Many of the early and mid-twentieth-century Jewish scholars who first explored previously shadowy episodes of mass adhesion to the Jewish people—men such as Nahum Slouschz, who wrote about the Berbers, and Abraham Polak, who studied the Khazars, and Yitzhak Ben-Tsvi, who dealt with the Jews of the Arabian Peninsula—were Zionists

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whose research had more than a merely scholarly motivation. In demonstrating, as they thought, that the Jewish people had once been less defensive, more adventuresome, more outgoing and open to the world, more confident of its ability to interact with others and to absorb them, they felt they were making a statement for their own age.

These scholars and thinkers wanted Zionism to expand the conventional notions of what a Jew was and could be. They desired Jews to understand that, in a land of their own, assimilation would be a force working for them rather than against them, since they now stood to be the assimilators and not the assimilated. (Some, such as Ben-Tsvi, later to become Israel's second president, even dreamed, before being disabused of the notion by Palestinian Arab nationalism, that a Palestinian Jewish society could re-absorb the country's Arabs, who were, he believed, the descendants of ancient Jews.) Yet, as Sand correctly observes, the pioneering work of these figures was never followed up by subsequent Israeli historians, who by and large lost interest in it.

The little-known chapters in Jewish history upon which figures such as Slouschz, Polak, and Ben-Tsvi sought to cast light receded again into the shadows, and were pushed back to the fringes of Israeli historical consciousness. Even most secular Israelis continue to think of themselves as belonging to a people descended from biblical times with little or no adulteration, which has stubbornly fought to preserve its constantly threatened identity by admitting only those newcomers willing to conform to its rigid religious standards. As non- or anti-religious as secular Israel may otherwise be, it has always lacked the will and the means to define Jewishness in any but traditional religious terms.

Sand, like other critics of Zionism, is wrong in believing that Israel cannot be both formally Jewish and functionally democratic, and that it must choose between the two. He is right, though, in regarding Israeli society's refusal to assume full responsibility for the assimilation of the over one and a half million non-Jews in its midst—immigrants from the ex-Soviet Union, foreign workers and their Israeli-born children, Israeli Arabs—as one of its great failures. If Israel is going to be Jewish and fully democratic, it will have to find other ways for non-Jews to become Jews, or to identify with Jews, than the forbidding Orthodox conversion that is currently their sole societal option. A revival of historical interest in how, in certain times and places in the past, non-Jews have been successfully integrated into the Jewish people in large numbers, and without too many questions asked, might be a contribution to such a process. Shlomo Sand's call for it is commendable. This is the best that can be said for an otherwise deplorable book. ◆

David Rieff

THE END OF HUNGER?

FAMINE: A SHORT HISTORY
By Cormac Ó Gráda
(Princeton University Press,
327 pp., $27.95)

The earliest recorded famines, according to Cormac Ó Gráda in his brief but masterful book, are mentioned on Egyptian stelae from the third millennium B.C.E. In that time—and to an extent, even today, above the Aswan dam in Sudan—farmers along the Nile were dependent on the river flooding to irrigate their fields. But one flood out of five, Ó Gráda tells us, was either too high or too low. The result was often starvation. The stelae commemorate the philanthropy of the aristocracy in providing food to the hungry. Other records of famine in the ancient world can be found in texts as various as Gilgamesh, the Joseph narrative in Genesis, Nehemiah, Cicero, and the Book of Revelation, in which the figure of famine is the third of the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

Leave Gilgamesh out of it. We now know enough about the history of famine for Ó Gráda to state confidently that the common denominator in most of the worst famines on record has been rain—too much of it or too little of it; while in some instances the cause seems to have been volcanic eruptions. The great famine that afflicted most of northern Europe between 1315 and 1322, from Ireland through Wales, England, and France, to Scandinavia and western Poland, was the result of heavy rains, flooding, and abnormally cold weather—the beginning of what is now known as the "Little Ice Age" in medieval Europe. The historian William Chester Jordan, who has written the definitive book on the subject, cautions that estimates of how many people died are hard to assess, but it seems that somewhere between one-third and one-fifth of the population perished of either hunger or disease.

A century earlier, in 1229, the Kangi famine in Japan—the result, it is generally thought, of volcanic activity and unseasonably damp weather—killed 20 percent of the population in many districts. More than a century later, in 1454, sixty-five years before Cortés's arrival, the so-called "famine of One Rabbit" in Mexico ("One Rabbit" being the name of the first year of the fifty-two-year Aztec calendar cycle) took place after a severe drought. And while Ó Gráda is guardedly skeptical of the claim made first by Thomas Malthus in his *Essay on Population* (and seconded, in the scholarship of our time, by Fernand Braudel and his followers) that famines were a common occurrence in history, the first table in his book, which sets out estimated death tolls from what he refers to as "selected famines," gives a very grim picture of the frequency of this disaster and its consequences. It lists an excess mortality of 1.5 million, and a death rate of 7 percent, for France in 1693 and 1694; 300,000 dead, and a 13 percent death rate, for Ireland in 1740 and 1741 (more than one hundred years before the potato famine); and nine and a half to thirteen million dead and a 3 percent death rate for China between 1877 and 1879. Elsewhere he speaks of the Brazilian Grande Seca of the same year causing half a million deaths, and of literally dozens of other famines occurring century in and century out, throughout the world.

Ó Gráda has a deeper quarrel with Malthus, which is to challenge the father of modern demography's fundamental claim that famine "seems to be the last, most dreadful resource of nature," and that "the power of population is so superior to the power in the earth to provide subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race." This may seem to make intuitive sense, and doubtless the survival of the Malthusian paradigm owes much to this impression. The problem is that Malthus was wrong. As Ó Gráda notes with characteristic understatement, "elementary demographic arithmetic argues against famines being as severe a demographic corrective as Malthus and others have suggested." If famines

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had really been as frequent as Malthus and his inheritors argued, it would have been impossible to sustain populations, let alone for them to grow. He is suitably cautious about how far the historical record before the seventeenth century can be trusted, but still Ó Gráda is willing to put his money on famines having been "less common in the past than claimed by Malthus or Braudel."

This is not to say that Ó Gráda is trying to prettify the long picture, and to underestimate how central, and how convulsive, famine has been to the human experience. Based on his account, it is hard not to conclude that, in terms of proportion of population killed, famine has taken the lives of many more people throughout most of recorded history than war. The two are catastrophically interrelated, of course—as closely linked to humanity's detriment as, in Amartya Sen's seminal insight, democracy is linked to the avoidance of famine, even in periods of failed harvests. But wrong as Malthus may have been—at least so far—about whether population growth must inevitably outstrip the availability of the food needed for human survival, he had sound reasons, in 1798, to treat famine as principally a natural phenomenon linked to weather, rather than as a calamity fundamentally caused by war and ideology—a political calamity. Ó Gráda, with his typical fair-mindedness, goes to some lengths to demonstrate that Malthus may have under-emphasized the latter connection, but he certainly did not deny it.

Ó Gráda begins to emphasize the centrality of famine's political dimension once his discussion moves away from pre-nineteenth-century famines to what might be called modern famines. The former, he insists, were mainly linked either to "extraordinary 'natural events'" or to "ecological shocks." In the latter, by contrast, the natural dimension more often than not played a subaltern role. As a result, while it seems doubtful that it was Ó Gráda's intention to defend Malthus, his account of "pre-modern" famines nonetheless seems to offer at least tacit support for some of Malthus's assumptions—as when, in a chapter called "Markets and Famines," Ó Gráda points out that Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (which was published in 1776, twenty-two years before Malthus's *Essay on Population*) got it wrong when, writing of the terrible famine in Bengal and Bihar in 1770, he attributed the cause principally to mistakes made by the East India Company. In reality the root cause was drought.

Famine is by no means Ó Gráda's only interest. Much of his writing has been on Irish economic history, including, in great depth, its twentieth-century history, not least as the author of the Oxford *New Economic History of Ireland*. His great book on the so-called potato famine—*Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy, and Memory*—is a model of care and skepticism about sentimentalizing the past or indulging in nationalist cant, even as it is a harrowing account of an event that, as Ó Gráda puts it, "was much more murderous, relatively speaking, than most historical and most modern famines." In his conclusion to that book, Ó Gráda refers dismissively to "a continued desire in Ireland 'to remember things we never knew' and an eagerness in some quarters further afield, particularly in the United States, to invoke the famine as a means of stoking up old resentments." That said, the memory of the famine—Ó Gráda is absolutely right to emphasize that element in *Black '47*—played an important role in the shaping of Irish nationalism, just as the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 did in defining, if only dialectically, Indian nationalism. (The historian Jill Bender has even argued that there is a link between the earlier Indian famine of 1873–1874 and the development of nineteenth-century Irish parliamentary nationalism.)

Given the stance he took in this earlier book, it is hardly surprising that when Ó Gráda turns to the ideological and political dimensions of the cause of the famines, he is unwilling to endorse a reductive account that assigns the complete responsibility for nineteenth-century famines to imperial policy. This view has its defenders, and has been expressed in subtle scholarly work by the geographer Michael Watts in his study of northern Nigeria. More recently, it has gained a currency it hardly deserves in *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* by Mike Davis, the self-described Marxist-environmentalist who teaches creative writing at UC Riverside, and whose general approach might be summarized as Wallerstein for Dummies. Davis's basic argument is that the deliberate strategy of the British empire was to turn droughts into famines in order to drag the colonies into the world economic system. As Davis puts it, "the great Victorian famines were forcing houses and accelerators of the very socio-economic forces that ensured their occurrence in the first place."

This is progressive tripe, and woefully consistent with Davis's previous work, which has been remarkable for its blend of sentimentality about peasant arcadia, conspiracy mongering, and fantasies about the emancipatory potential of various urban jacqueries. (In his work on Los Angeles, Davis saw proto-revolutionary potential in the Crips and the Bloods.) Davis is emblematic of an influential strain in environmentalist thinking about agriculture, which insists, against most of the evidence and against common sense, that before the advent of modernity, imperial or otherwise, peasants possessed both the wisdom and the means to stave off famine. Before the dystopian advent of industrial agriculture, this argument runs, peasants had sustainable and effective systems of crop diversification and water-harvesting, and it was only when they were deprived of the capacity to deploy this knowledge that famine and misery became rampant. It is this arcadian fantasy that is as much at the heart of much of the current opposition to genetically engineered seeds as the entirely justifiable fear of agricultural multinationals owning patents to foods, the possibility that safeguards against health risks are insufficient, and the problem of whether poor farmers can ever sustainably afford GE seeds. People such as Davis write as if there were no famines before imperialism. They have misunderstood the history of famine, or chosen to misunderstand it.

The reality is that if there was a malign side to British imperial famine policy—and, though you wouldn't know it from Niall Ferguson and Adam Roberts and others, God knows there was!—it was a Malthusian malignity: the view that, as Malthus himself wrote, "gigantic inevitable famine … with one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world." Malthusianism provided a pseudo-scientific pretext—the great famine specialist Alex de Waal has called it "one of the most monstrous intellectual aberrations of all time"—for the British authorities to fail to aid the poor. But it was most emphatically not a charter to foment famine, as Davis claims.

What is true is that Malthusianism exerted a tremendous and pernicious influence on Victorian thinking in terms of its moral complacency about the suffering of the poor and of its mistaken analysis of why famines actually occur. In 1805, the East India Company appointed Malthus professor of political economy at the college that it maintained in Haileybury. His views, based less on his actual writings and more on what de Waal calls the "oral tradition" of Malthusianism, persisted until at least the early 1880s. Yet

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there was no conspiracy and no master plan, and by the 1870s British imperial policy was swinging strongly toward what de Waal, who is hardly known for his admiration for imperialism, calls in *Famine Crimes*—an essential book—"a commitment to employing the destitute and hungry." This changed analysis of the nature of famine and the responsibilities of government led first to the appointment of a Famine Commission and then to the Famine Codes of imperial India. As Sen has pointed out, these codes, modified and improved in a series of "Scarcity Manuals" issued after independence, remain at the root of the methodology currently being used effectively by the government of India to prevent famine.

De Waal actually goes further, arguing that "ceding an anti-famine political contract was the price paid by Britain for maintaining imperial rule in India." And he speculates that the failure of the colonial government to live up to this contract during the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 contributed powerfully to the further mobilization of anti-colonial sentiment in India. As de Waal puts it, "this was a vindication of the Famine Commissioners' insight that effective famine prevention would put a brake on anti-British sentiment."

Ó Gráda hardly holds European domination blameless. His general view seems to be that, to the extent we are in a position to know, pre-nineteenth-century famines were principally the result of natural phenomena, but that subsequently, even though natural factors were almost always part of the explanation, the most important causes have been policy failures, wars, or what he calls "the violence of governments." Ó Gráda looks at the three major famines that took place, and one that was averted, in Bengal since the mid-eighteenth century, and concludes (tentatively, because of the deficits in the data) that 1769–1770, which allegedly killed one third of the affected population, was the result of drought, and that 1873–1874 was prevented because of sound public policy, and that 1896–1897 took place despite it, and that the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 was due mainly to World War II, and partly to policy failure, and only slightly to a food shortfall.

The account in Ó Gráda's book of the link between colonialism and famine is admirably nuanced. "On balance," he writes, "the initial impact of colonial conquest and 'pacification' was almost certainly to increase famine mortality." Some of the examples he cites are Mexico in the 1520s, Ireland in the 1580s and 1650s, Namibia and Angola before 1920, the Xhosa lands in South Africa in the 1850s, and northern Nigeria in the second decade of the twentieth century.

That is the case for the anti-imperialist prosecution. In mitigation, Ó Gráda insists that colonialism's subsequent impact was less clear. "In the longer run," he writes, "although colonial rule may have eliminated or weakened traditional coping mechanisms, it meant better communications, integrated markets, and more effective public action, which together probably reduced famine mortality." And Ó Gráda points out that while "colonial exactions during World War I produced famine in several parts of Africa … famines were almost certainly much fewer between the 1920s and the end of the colonial era than they had been before the post-1880s 'scramble for Africa.'"

Alex de Waal has significantly observed that, contrary to our present view, which firmly associates famine with sub-Saharan Africa, until the early 1970s famine was "virtually synonymous with one or other Asian country," and that "most modern famine theory and practice originate there." While Ó Gráda's scope is global, and he treats the Great Irish Famine and a number of African famines at length and in some detail, inevitably the historical material in his book is centered on China and India. For Ó Gráda, the Bengal Famine of 1943 is the "paradigmatic disaster." He can say this so confidently less because of its magnitude (while it killed around two million people by most estimates, its toll was proportionally lower than the Irish famine of 1847, and lower in absolute numbers than the famines in the Soviet Union in both 1921–1922 and 1932–1933, and far lower than the 1959–1961 famine in China during the so-called Great Leap Forward) than because the study of the Great Bengal Famine fundamentally transformed the way we now think about famines, and about how to relieve or prevent them.

As Ó Gráda generously insists, this was due almost single-handedly to the work of Amartya Sen, who, as he puts it, "refocused" famine studies, reorienting it "from a Malthusian toward a distributionist perspective." Sen emphasized that a famine caused by a failure, or even just a serious shortfall, in the harvest would rapidly engender a devaluation of all non-food possessions—what famine specialists call "entitlements," so that the poorest people basically lose the purchasing power they need to ensure their own survival. Looking at the data without Malthusian prejudice, Sen demonstrated that it was simply not the case that food shortfalls were necessarily greater in periods of famine than they were in times when there was no threat of famine—and that, conversely, there were many periods, not only in Bengal but globally, in which the availability of food had actually declined and no famine had ensued.

To state it simply, if a bit reductively: Sen's work put an end, once and for all, to the false belief, derived from Malthus, that famines are primarily the result of food shortages and overpopulation. This may seem counter-intuitive, since overpopulation can be a factor and food shortfalls are a common proximate cause of famines. But whatever modifications Sen has made to his analysis in the three decades since he published his magisterial work *Poverty and Famines*, his fundamental idea that the principle cause of famine is not food availability within a given area but access to food—that is, whether people have the means of getting enough to eat, is now beyond question. Sen's other fundamental notion, developed in these pages, that democracy, or civil and political rights and press freedom, offer practical protection from famine, is somewhat more intuitive, and, in contrast to his theory of entitlements—a person's "ability to command enough food," as Sen put it—seems in need of complication. This is not because it is wrong, but because, as de Waal has pointed out, other preconditions such as administrative capacity have to exist for even democratic governments in poor countries to combat famine. As the example of China from the late 1960s demonstrates, it is also true that non-democratic governments may succeed in stamping out famine.

It is now absolutely clear that while many factors contributed to the Great Bengal Famine, an overall absence of food grains was not one of them. For Sen, the famine was principally the result of

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bureaucratic bungling by the British authorities and the consequent market failure. Ó Gráda demurs slightly, arguing that it was "largely due to the failure of the British authorities, for war-strategic reasons, to make good a genuine food deficit." Mars, he says, played a greater role than Malthus. Ó Gráda is unsparing, and his understatement is far more damning than the reckless speculations of Mike Davis, who is piously convinced that the British intentionally caused the deaths by starvation of millions of Bengalis. ("Wartime priorities," Ó Gráda writes, "deprived the Bengali poor of the food they so badly needed, disrupted food markets [to some extent], inhibited free speech, and delayed the public proclamation of famine conditions. The conclusion seems inescapable: the two million and more who perished in Bengal were mainly unwilling, colonial casualties of a struggle not of their own making—that against fascism.")

But if, in reality, the Great Bengal Famine was the last major unintended famine in Asia, all too many twentieth-century famines have been, as Ó Gráda writes, "deliberately engineered to kill." Had Davis really been looking for 'holocausts', he need have looked no further than the famine created by Lenin's government in 1920, by Stalin's in 1932, and by Mao's in 1959. Those catastrophes—ideologically inconvenient to the radical anti-imperialist left—really do fit his template of deliberately engineered acts of mass murder. It is these events, and their successors (above all in two other *soi-disant* Marxist regimes, Ethiopia in 1984–1985 and North Korea in 1995–1996), to which Ó Gráda turns in the last narrative chapter of his book.

Ó Gráda does not mince his words, and they are worth quoting at length. "It is a great irony," he writes,

> that the most deadly famines of the last century—including the worst ever in terms of sheer numbers—occurred under regimes committed, at least on paper, to the eradication of poverty. The history of the USSR (1917–1989) is pockmarked by famine. Post-1949 China's remarkable record of achievements in terms of life expectancy and material progress will always be marred by the Great Leap Forward famine of 1959-61, resulting in the deaths of millions of people. Today, the people of the Democratic Republic of North Korea struggle to survive in the wake of a smaller famine.

While the degree to which the famine of 1920–1922 was actually orchestrated by Lenin's government may be impossible to establish, what Ó Gráda calls military "requisitions" for the revolutionary war effort—a policy that does not seem to have been very different from what the British did in Bengal in 1943—clearly played an important role. About the Soviet famine in 1932, sometimes called (though not by Ó Gráda) Stalin's "terror famine" and chronicled by Robert Conquest in his great prosecutor's brief *Harvest of Sorrow*, there is less doubt. While Ó Gráda is adamant that Conquest's argument that the famine was deliberately engineered and politically motivated, particularly against Ukrainians, and compounded by the famine deaths occasioned by what Ó Gráda calls "forced migration to the Gulag," needs to be revised, he certainly does not repudiate what he refers to as "the traditional verdict." The most that he is willing to say is that one must also see the famine as "the outcome of a political struggle between a ruthless regime, bent on industrialization at breakneck speed, and an exploited and uncooperative peasantry."

About the famine of 1959 in China, which is often referred to as the worst man-made famine in history, Ó Gráda is equally judicious. The truth about the famine, he writes (adding, typically, "insofar as it can be inferred from the fallible sources available"), is that it "was due to a combination of natural and man-made causes"—"three parts nature and

Chronic

Four a.m.
I've taken the pain in my hip to the dark
winds to be cured. An old rain has recently
died. The air is warm and wet, it's necessary
to trust this is the beginning of time. A second,
a windrain falls from the trees
against the stars. If I think of winds
as whales gliding past, keening their wants,
the pain has to contend with this ocean
in how I feel, is buoyed up and down,
breathed into and against itself, and smalls,
from a blade to a pin. Now I am
wind, am skating on a pond
cracking to the left of ice-trapped
reeds, gray sky of November, of ninth grade,
I am loose above the booming sense
of doom, and vanished, as far as my life knows.
If this memory were a painting, I'd refer to it
on the phone as lonely, as I would a man
on a deck offering himself as a fetus
to the wind. But from here, from inside,
I hear how blood must sound
to the heart, arriving spent, leaving charged.
Must sound, might sound, could sound:
already, the effort to be effortless
has arrowed its way to doubt, which wording,
arrives, returning the pain
full gale. An inventory of my storms
seems the worst kind of breadcrumbing, for where
am I trying to return? I don't know.
I'm fifty and broken and don't know.
When they gut me, I'll be built of shrugs
and elations. That almost sounds
like a recipe, almost sounds
sound.

BOB HICOK

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seven parts man," in the words that he quotes from Liu Sha-ch'i, the nominal head of the Chinese state between 1959 and his death under torture at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1969. The point is an important one. It is too common for discussions of the causes of famine that take place in the aftermath of Sen's pathbreaking work to give the impression that natural factors have no role whatsoever in famines, and that only political malevolence, economic inequality, or bureaucratic bungling are to blame. This is certainly not what Sen meant to imply. It is certainly not Ó Gráda's view. But whatever the role of natural causes, the role of the state in these great famines has been incontrovertibly terrible.

Ó Gráda is equally cautious in offering a view as to whether the famines in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s and North Korea in the mid-1990s fit "the same category" as those in the Soviet Union or the China of the Great Leap Forward. His caution does him credit, but while he is right to insist that we know too little about what took place in North Korea (he cites a CIA report, for example, that casts doubt on the commonplace journalistic assertion that famine killed up to three million people in the DPRK in the 1990s), he is perhaps overly cautious with regard to the Ethiopian famine. He is right to say that the war waged by the Ethiopian government against secessionist movements in the northern provinces of Wollo and Tigre was "a more important contributory factor [to the famine] than its ill-advised economic policies." But for once Ó Gráda's scholarly caution seems excessive.

In the words of the late François Jean, a leading figure in Doctors Without Borders and a man who knew the Ethiopian situation intimately, famine came to be used by the government in Addis Ababa as "a trump card to weaken opposition movements and control populations." Like Soviet Russia in the immediate aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution and like China in the Great Leap Forward, Ethiopia was a country where, as Jean put it, "a revolutionary rhetoric [coincided] with the actual execution of a radical project of social restructuring." And as in Russia and China before, what occurred was "the logical product of a system that seeks to lead an entire society on a forced march towards an absolute, compulsory Good."

Still, Ó Gráda is absolutely correct in saying that, globally speaking, "the scope … to produce cataclysmic famine even in peacetime" is much reduced compared with what it has been in the past. In this, he explicitly endorses de Waal's argument that famine is now conquerable, and Sen's view that if the political will exists, then famines are not hard to prevent. De Waal actually puts the claim even more strongly in *Famine Crimes*, arguing that "for more than a century there has been no excuse for famine." And while he is unwilling (or perhaps temperamentally averse) to write so categorically, Ó Gráda's analysis does seem to concur. As he notes, even in the case of Niger in 2005, probably the most serious case of famine in this decade, "a combination of public action, market forces, and food aid [has tended] to mitigate mortality." Put another way, even where famines do occur—above all in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, which Ó Gráda dubs "the last redoubts of famine"—they are less deadly.

This African exception is not difficult to explain. "Only in sub-Saharan Africa," Ó Gráda remarks, "has the food output failed to keep pace with the population." And while Ó Gráda is at pains to underline the point that the link between the aggregate food supply and famine is "looser nowadays than it was in Malthus' time," the combination of the steady desertification of the Sahel since 1970 and the essential fact that only in parts of sub-Saharan Africa has the so-called demographic transition to lower fertility rates even begun to take place (unlike in China, India, Mexico, Vietnam, Bangladesh, and elsewhere) means, in Ó Gráda's words, that African agriculture "has been running in order to stand still."

This does not mean that the situation is hopeless, even in the world's most ill-favored countries, such as Niger. The U.N.'s World Food Programme, whose food aid now is the difference between life and death for starving people in the global hunger zones, is increasingly studying strategies for pre-empting famines and periods of acute malnutrition, rather than responding to them once they have already begun. Even longtime critics of the WFP, both among nongovernmental relief agencies and relief specialists, believe that under its current director, Josette Sheeran, the agency is performing more effectively than ever, and in conditions that have rarely been more difficult. Another reason for cautious optimism about the fate of contemporary famine may be culled from Sen's argument that civil and political rights are in themselves prophylactics against famine, and that the more democratic a society becomes, the less famine-prone it is likely to be. In my view, Ó Gráda somewhat overstates the advance of democracy in Africa, but there can be no question that substantial progress has been made over the last twenty years.

The final chapter of Ó Gráda's book is called "An End to Famine?" It is a question, not an assertion. He is right to put it that way. What is far less certain is whether his claim that "as much as anything else, the slow, onward march of accountable government will rid the world's last vulnerable regions of the scourge of famine," and, more broadly, that "the prospect of a famine-free world hinges on improved governance and peace," is not overly sanguine. Ó Gráda knows that while famine may now be preventable, there is no good reason to believe the same of war—and war between and within nations is for him what may usher in a new age of famine.

But war is not the only threat. Climate change, which by most projections will disproportionately damage rural Africa, but may well also cause great damage in parts of Asia from which famine has now been banished, surely poses a graver threat of famine than war does. Some wars can be prevented or halted, but it is unlikely, given the pressing nature of the climate emergency and the apparent unwillingness or incapacity of the principal polluters—the United States, the EU, Japan, China, India—to do anything serious to mitigate it, that the same can be said about global warming. Ó Gráda touches on climate change, but gives it less emphasis than its importance warrants—a signal failing in an otherwise magnificent book.

No one looking for sensible rather than sentimental or ideological reasons to believe in the possibility of human progress need look any further than the fact that, for the first time in human history, it is possible to imagine the end of famine. When Ó Gráda writes that "at present, only the poorest regions of Africa remain at risk, and *prolonged* famine anywhere is conceivable only in contexts of endemic warfare or blockade," he is saying something that could never have been said before. To be sure, there are also many other things to say, other questions to ask—most notably why, if we are now so competent at dealing with famine, we are so incompetent at dealing with chronic malnutrition, which is getting no better, and in some cases is actually getting worse, even in democratic countries such as India that seem to have banished famine. The other three horsemen of the apocalypse will likely always be with us. But the possibility that we have seen the fourth horseman off for good is a reason for the most profound thankfulness. ◆

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Washington Diarist

Platon's Cave

I am as worldly as the next dreamer, but the scales fell from my eyes, the same ones that keep finding their way back to my eyes, when I opened *The New Yorker* a few weeks ago and found, in a portfolio of "portraits of power," Mussolini's full-page face piggishly staring at me in chicly lurid detail, the very emblem of brutality made aesthetically acceptable. And when I turned the page there was Franco, in full generalissimo kit gazing coldly forward, every hair on his heartless mustache uncannily vivid in a miracle of photographic verisimilitude. Is nobody any longer beyond the pale? Is moral judgment now bad form? Is repugnance a thing of the past? I'm lying, of course. Neither Mussolini nor Franco appeared in *The New Yorker*'s exciting feature. But Ahmadinejad, Mugabe, Chávez, and Qaddafi did. They were shot—sorry, I'm dreaming again—they were photographed by Platon at the United Nations in September, where, according to an unsigned editor's note, he set up a little studio not far from the General Assembly. "For months, members of the magazine's staff had been writing letters to various governments and embassies"—imagine some of those letters!—"but the project was a five-day-long improvisation, with Platon doing his best to lure the likes of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Hugo Chávez, and Muammar Qaddafi to his camera." I guess Omar Al Bashir was out of town. The photographer made things worse with an unbelievable audio account of the adventure. "To get Chávez was a big, big deal," he exulted. And "Ahmadinejad is, believe it or not, a very childlike man. He's short, shorter than me, I think. He giggles like a little boy. I didn't want to paint a caricature of him: tough and mean. I wanted to show this irony that there's an innocence about his eyes. So that's what this picture is about." Actually, that's not what this picture is about. It is a perfectly familiar photo that conveys, in unfascinating close-up, only the sitter's trademark smirk. The picture is about the art of the get, and nothing more. The editor's note compares Platon's project to Avedon—and alludes to Velázquez, like any undergraduate discussion of portraits of power—but these pictures display none of Avedon's revelations, or interpretations, in portraiture. Avedon's distortions were at least the evidence of a temperament; but there is no temperament in Platon's people, there is just a pushy frontality and a phony intimacy, as if you capture a person when you capture his pores. These pictures are exercises in a stylized neutrality, a willful indifference to everything we know about their subjects. There is not "an innocence" about Ahmadinejad's eyes, or ears, or nose. He is, in his every detail, guilty. He represses his society and subjugates its women and shoots its young people and steals its elections and threatens to incinerate another country. Fuck his giggle.

What these silly sanitizations really capture is the American moment, the Obama coolness. Fareed Zakaria, the black-tie barometer, recently praised Obama as "the anti-Churchill." Now that's a contemporary compliment! We have become too smart and too sensitive for indignation. We regard the hatred of evil, even the talk of evil, as a preparation for war. We are beyond good and evil and we are beyond zero sum. To be sure, hatred is not quite an analysis; but still a word must be said on its behalf. Hatred may be a sign that something has been properly understood. If you do not hate racism, then you do not understand what it is. If you do not hate Ahmadinejad, then you do not understand who he is. In Washington, however, indignation is scorned as impractical. It is the business of the government of our state, after all, to do business with the governments of other states; and we do not choose who governs other states. We have objectives that we cannot achieve on our own. We cannot prevent the Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons, for example, without the cooperation of the Iranians. For this reason, we have elected to deny democratization a prominent place in our Iran policy. This, we are told, is the responsible thing to do. But what if one believes that it cannot be done? There is nothing, certainly, in the history of the ayatollahs' diplomacy that suggests an inclination to compromise, or to honesty. What if one holds that the only reliable way to guarantee that Iran will not threaten its region with weapons of mass destruction is the establishment of a legitimate and decent and rational government in Tehran that will not make such a threat? If this is what one believes, and there are plentiful grounds for such a view, then it is the suppression of indignation, the refusal to side—to engage!—in strong and sophisticated ways with the democracy movement, that is impractical. Sometimes I hear that such arguments and passions—such "brickbats"—are fine "on the outside," but the president cannot afford them, because he has problems to solve. This is exactly backward. It is the president who has the authority to educate the American people in the purposes of our policy, and it is the president who has the power to make those purposes historically consequential. This, I think, was the education of Bosnia; and we are witnessing the disappearance of the Bosnian education from the making of American foreign policy.

In an interesting volume called *Civil Resistance and Power Politics*, edited by Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, I am startled to find among the case studies of non-violent revolution a chapter on the Iranian revolution of 1978–1979. It is described as "an outstanding case of a revolution through civil disobedience." The author, Ervand Abrahamian, declares that Khomeini's uprising "would have won the admiration of … Rosa Luxemburg and even Mahatma Gandhi." Khomeini himself, we are instructed, "was consistent in shunning violence." This I have never seen before: Gandhi, King, Havel, Walesa, Khomeini. Not a mention by the progressive professor of the mass savageries, the shootings and the burnings, that attended the seizure of power and its aftermath. This revolution that "'came' from below rather than was 'made' from above" was in fact quite a bloodbath. The essay concludes, not surprisingly, with the reassurance that the opposition to the theocracy will call "not for the overthrow of the Islamic republic but for its democratization." This is apologetics. Are they not the same thing? Anyway, those words have already been refuted in the streets of Tehran. You see? Sometimes it is the absence of hatred that addles the mind.

Leon Wieseltier

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You deserve a factual look at . . .

Israel: A Light unto the Nations

Those who demonize Israel are either misinformed or malevolent

If that proverbial man from Mars came to visit and read the world's newspapers, especially those in the Arab and Muslim world, he would be convinced that Israel was the most evil nation in the world and the source of all of the world's strife.

What are the facts?

A nation to be emulated. The reality, of course, is that Israel is a nation, a society, that should be admired and emulated by many countries in the world. The very fact of how the State of Israel came into being is one of the most inspiring in history. Born out of the ashes of the Holocaust, it has emerged as one of the most advanced, productive and prosperous countries in the world.

The demonization of Israel, assiduously cultivated by the Muslim world, has reached a crescendo following Israel's recent defensive action in Gaza. Instead of being grateful to the hated Jews for having totally withdrawn, the Palestinian Gazans showed their gratitude by almost daily pounding Israeli towns with close to 10,000 rockets and bombs. After countless warnings, Israel ultimately decided to put an end to this travesty.

When Israel finally did invade Gaza it took the most elaborate precautions not to hurt civilians. As a first in the history of warfare, Israel dropped tens of thousands of leaflets, warning the population and urging it to abandon areas in which military action would take place. The Israeli military made thousands of phone calls urging people to leave areas that would come under attack. But fighting in a densely populated environment is difficult and loss of civilian life is hard to avoid. Hamas fighters wear no uniforms. It is impossible to tell them from civilians. Is a person who allows a rocket launcher in his backyard a civilian or a fighter? And how about using schools, hospitals and mosques as munitions depots and staff centers? The hue and cry of Israel's demonizers in accusing it of "disproportionate force" is totally absurd. The ultimate insult, comparing Israel to the Nazis, is freely bandied about by Israel's detractors.

Israel is not an "apartheid state." Another familiar tack of Israel's vilifiers is to call it an "apartheid state," on the model of former South Africa. But that is so ridiculous, so preposterous, it is hard to believe that serious people can countenance it. The exact opposite is the case. Israel is the only country in its benighted neighborhood in which people of all colors and religions prosper and have equal rights. Israel, expending substantial effort, rescued tens of thousands of black Jews from Ethiopia. And it has given assistance and absorbed countless Christian expatriates from Sudan, who escaped from being slaughtered by their Muslim countrymen. Israel's over one million Arab citizens enjoy the same rights and privileges as their Jewish fellows. They are represented in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, and are members of its bureaucracy, of its judiciary, and of its diplomatic service.

> "As the prophet Isaiah presaged: Israel is indeed a Light unto the Nations."

All over the world, Leftists, including in the United States and, sad to say, even in Israel itself, tirelessly condemn and vilify Israel. Why would they do that? First, of course, there is good old-fashioned anti-Semitism. Second, many of those who hate the United States vent their poison on Israel, which they consider being America's puppet in that area of the world. But Israel should certainly get top grades in all areas important to the Left. In contrast to all its enemies, Israel has the same democratic institutions as the United States. All religions thrive freely in Israel. Also, in contrast to all of its enemies, women have the same rights as men. The Chief Justice of Israel's Supreme Court is a woman. One-sixth of the Knesset are women. Compare that to Saudi Arabia, a medieval theocracy, where women are not allowed to drive cars, where they cannot leave the country without permission of a male relative, and where they can be and often are condemned to up to 60 lashes if the "modesty police" deems them not to be properly dressed in public. Gays and lesbians are totally unmolested in Israel; in the surrounding Muslim countries they would be subjected to the death penalty.

In spite of demonization and vilification by so much of the world, Israel is indeed a Light unto the Nations. The State of Israel is the foremost creation of the Jewish enterprise and Jewish intellect that has benefited every country in which Jews dwell, certainly our own country, the United States. Second only to the United States itself, Israel is the world's most important factor in science and technology, way out of proportion to the small size of its population. Israeli Jews are at the forefront of the arts, the sciences, law and medicine. They have brought all these sterling qualities to bear in building their own country: Israel. By necessity, they have also become outstanding in agriculture and, most surprisingly, in the military. What a shame that the Arabs opted not to participate in this progress and this prosperity and chose instead the path of revenge, of Jihad and of martyrdom. As the prophet Isaiah presaged: Israel is indeed a Light unto the Nations.

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The country that put a man on the moon can
cure cancer.
We've always embraced big challenges in this country. It's how the world sees us. How we see ourselves.
Now, President Obama has called on us to end cancer in our lifetime. America's pharmaceutical research and biotechnology companies share that goal. Today, our scientists are working on 800 new medicines to fight this deadly disease that touches so many lives.
It won't be easy, and it won't happen without a renewed emphasis on innovation and a sustained commitment to research and development. Last year, we invested more than $65 billion to discover and develop medicines to help patients live longer, healthier and more productive lives. Like President Obama, we believe that America's best days are ahead of us. Working together, we can do anything.
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